

1,001 TIPS FOR WRITERS

**Words of Wisdom About Writing,
Getting Published, and Living
the Literary Life**

Quotations Selected by
WILLIAM A. GORDON

BOOKS BY WILLIAM A. GORDON

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1,001 Tips For Writers:

*Words of Wisdom About Writing, Getting Published,
and Living the Literary Life*

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WORDS OF WISDOM ABOUT WRITING, GETTING
PUBLISHED, AND LIVING THE LITERARY LIFE

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NORTH RIDGE BOOKS

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Readers who would like to suggest tips for possible inclusion in subsequent editions may contact Mr. Gordon at BGordonLA@aol.com. Additional tips can also be found on the web site www.1001tipsforwriters.com.

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Dedicated to
Adele

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∞ INTRODUCTION ∞

This book offers some of the best advice on writing and getting published today. It is presented in the form of quotations and offers advice from a wide variety of books, magazines, newspapers, trade journals, speeches, and articles on the Internet, as well as original gems from notable writers.

The book includes:

- Advice on how to get commercially published
- The factors involved in deciding whether you should (or should not) self-publish
- Tips on coping with rejection and the inspirational success stories of writers who struggled for years
- The habits that separate professional writers from the amateurs
- Advice on how to create memorable characters
- Tips on how to get rich in publishing (marry a publisher's daughter, George Orwell said!), and
- The reasons why you cannot trust some writers. As author Susan Braudy put it, I hope not seriously: "I'm basically a treacherous person with no sense of loyalty. I'd write openly about my sainted mother's sex life for art."

For good measure, I also include some pretty decent jokes and several facts of literary life that aspiring and more experienced writers really should know.

My hope is that you will enjoy this book as much as I enjoyed

creating it. This is a book I wish someone had given me when I began my career as a full-time author and publisher. If I had known thirty years ago what I know now, I could have spared myself a lot of time and heartbreak. This book should give writers, especially aspiring writers, a better start.

William A. Gordon

∞ ADVICE ON GETTING TRADITIONALLY PUBLISHED ∞

It is largely within your power to determine whether a publisher will buy your work and whether the public will buy it once it's released... Failures abound because hardly anybody treats getting published as if it were a rational, manageable activity — like practicing law or laying bricks — in which knowledge coupled with skill and application would suffice to ensure success.

— **JUDITH APPELBAUM and NANCY EVANS**, *How to Get Happily Published*

Too many writers, in trying to secure the services of a literary agent or publisher, simply do not do their homework. The best way to get an agent's or editor's attention is to write an intelligent and succinct letter. And then send it to the right person.

— **BETSY LERNER**, *The Forest for the Trees*

Some editors recommend that you go to the public library and read back issues of *Publishers Weekly*. That would give you the names of agents who are most likely to be interested in your book. You can also look at the acknowledgments page of books that are in the same genre or which that appeal to the same readers. You will find lots of leads there.

— **WILLIAM A. GORDON**, editor, *1,001 Tips for Writers*

There is one source that continues to be extremely valuable (and which I used to generate interest from several literary agents): *Jeff Herman's*

Writer's Guide to Book Editors, Publishers and Literary Agents.

— **SHERRY KAHN, MPH**, author, *Surviving the U. S. Health System*, April 2013

An author should try to get an agent to represent him. Selling a manuscript cold is the toughest way I know to get published.

— **WILLIAM TARG**, *Indecent Pleasures*

It's harder for a new writer to get an agent than a publisher.

— **ROGER STRAUS**, former president, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, acknowledging the Catch-22 situation that many new writers face. Quoted in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, March 30, 1980.

In business, contacts are the name of the game. Why, in the art world, are they considered dirty? Getting published is business, too.

— **BRETT SINGER**, novelist

A number of agents report in interviews that they discover many of their writers through the literary journals. We're not talking about *The New Yorker* or *The Atlantic Monthly*, either. These are the more obscure literary journals — *Front Porch Review*, *Brooklyn*, *Arcadia Magazine*, *The Main Street Rag*. There are hundreds of them. Most of them are titles you have never heard of, with no budget to pay contributors. Many of them are online.

— **TIM SUNDERLAND**, novelist, March 21, 2013, blog, <http://whatifyoucouldnotfail.typepad.com/blog/2013/03/the-importance-of-literary-journals-and-short-stories.html>

Literature is like any other trade, you will never sell anything unless you go to the right shop.

— **GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**, quoted in *Peter's Quotations*
by Dr. Laurence J. Peter

Publishers are always on the lookout for a good book. This is something to keep in mind no matter how discouraging the prospect of finding a publisher is, no matter how many rejection slips you get, and no matter how overwhelming the odds seem.

— **RICHARD BALKIN**, *A Writer's Guide to Book Publishing*

Outlets for writing are multiplying rapidly nowadays, as new technology makes small presses and self-publishing ventures economically feasible. And at large houses, as well as small, editorial tastes are always so varied there should be an editor somewhere who's looking for what you have to offer.

— **JUDITH APPELBAUM and NANCY EVANS**, *How to Get Happily Published*

When novice writers ask my advice about getting published, one point I can't emphasize too strongly is the importance of being absolutely relentless about submissions. Once you've got a story to the point where you think it's worth submitting, you must submit it and submit it and submit it until someone somewhere breaks down and buys it.

— **LAWRENCE BLOCK**, *Telling Lies for Fun and Profit*

After twenty commercial publishing houses have turned down a book, I try a small press. When you love a book, you can't give up.

— **ELLEN LEVINE**, agent, quoted in *The Writing Business: A Poets & Writers Handbook*

Until you have canvassed at least 25–30 publishers you haven’t given your book the chance it has to get published.

— **RICHARD BALKIN**, agent, *Writer’s Yearbook 86*

You have to keep writing, keep submitting, and keep praying to the god of whimsy that some editor will respond favorably.

— **PETER BENCHLEY**, novelist

In the end it’s up to you. I’d say that in today’s tough publishing climate, you have to want to be a writer very, very much in order to succeed.

— **JOSEPH HANSEN**, mystery writer

It is not unusual for one editor at a publishing firm to reject a book only to have the same book accepted by another editor... Even if the firm turns you down once, you can go back to the other people at the house — assuming, of course, that management has changed or that the book was never presented to the top decision makers in the first place.

— **BILL ADLER**, *Inside Publishing*

The best place to discuss terms with an editor is in bed after a couple of double martinis.

— An unidentified female writer, quoted by agent Donald MacCampbell in his book, *The Writing Business*

See also “[Perseverance](#),” “[Success and Failure](#),” “[Rejection](#)” and “[Humor](#)” — a large sense of which you will need if you ever deal with

publishers. As Michelle Slung noted in her book column in the November 25, 1984, *Washington Post*: “There are hundreds of stories about caterpillarish rejection-slip collectors who turn into best-selling butterflies. In the meantime, a sense of humor and above all else, patience are qualities it doesn’t hurt any aspiring writer to have, while the ability to maintain a certain fatalistic calm is useful, too.”

∞ BOOK PUBLICITY & MARKETING ∞

Getting published is not your only goal. Your book must sell well enough to sustain your writing career.

— **MARK O'BANNON**, "What Are the Odds of Getting Published?" March 1, 2011, www.betterstorytelling.net/blog/3-writingtools/what-are-the-odds-of-getting-published.html

The main difference between marketing a book and marketing soap is that a book is a one-shot deal... and a book usually only has 90 days to make it or it's dead.

— **CAROLE DOLPH**, former promotional manager, Doubleday & Company

Somewhere between milk and yogurt.

— **CALVIN TRILLIN**, *Uncivil Liberties*, commenting on the average shelf life of a book

The struggle in publishing... is to get attention in a crowded marketplace.

— **SIMON MICHAEL BESSIE**, editor, quoted in *U. S. News and World Report*, December 5, 1983

Even if you have the next *Gone With the Wind*, it will not sell itself.

— **BARBARA GRIER**, vice president, Naiad Press, writing in *Small Press* magazine, November/December 1985

Bookstores base their decision on whether or not to carry a book on one

question: “Will it sell?” They couldn’t care less if it has great literary merit, deals with significant subject matter, or is beautifully illustrated.

— **TOM and MARILYN ROSS**, *The Complete Guide to Self-Publishing*

When I first got into the publishing business, I was stunned by the lack of market research into who was buying what. Books are labored over, beautifully produced, only to be sent out into the world like a message in a bottle; if it washes up on a beach, fine; if it sinks, also fine.

— **JAMES ATLAS**, “Will Publishing Survive?,” *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, February 25, 2001

As someone who has spent her life in advertising, doing endless research about the end user, I’m continually shocked by the lack of information publishers have about readers. And even worse their lack of concern about the information they don’t have.

— **M. J. ROSE**, “E-Gads 2009! Publishing E-pocalypse or A New Age,” *Write Good or Die* by Scott Nicholson, Gayle Lynds, Kevin J. Anderson, and M. J. Rose. (I think they meant *Write Well or Die*.)

The effort a publisher makes with a book is largely determined by how much they have paid for it.

— **CECILIA BRAYFIELD**, *Bestseller: Secrets of Successful Writing*

So many people think, “Well, there’s the bookstore. I just got my book in there and I’m done. Everything else will be taken care of for me; I just

go to my mailbox and pick up my check.” That’s the furthest thing from the truth.

— **JERROLD R. JENKINS**, publishing consultant, quoted in Associated Press accounts, March 16, 1998

Once upon a time, all the author had to do was write the book. But those times are long gone. Publishing houses now expect authors to play an up-close-and-personal role in promoting their books.

— **CAROLE GOLDBERG**, “Knock ’Em Dead, and Other Stories,” *Hartford Courant*, March 6, 2005

In an industry where little money is spent on advertising, free publicity is the name of the game.

— “In Today’s Marketplace, It’s Hype, Hype, Hype,” *U.S. News and World Report*, December 5, 1983

[Be] shameless. Try anything within reason to get your book noticed.

— **WILLIAM TARG**’s advice to editors, “What’s an Editor,” *Editors on Editing*

Even the most egregious act of self-promotion will be forgiven in time.

— **TONY PERROTTET**, “How Writers Build the Brand,” *New York Times Book Review*, April 29, 2011,
www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/books/review/how-writers-build-the-brand.html

It is always comforting to be reminded that literary whoring — I mean, self-marketing — has been practiced by the greats.

— **TONY PERROTTET**, “How Writers Build the Brand,” *New York Times Book Review*, April 29, 2011,
www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/books/review/how-writers-build-the-brand.html

In this business, humility is for chumps.

— **TOM MONTELEONE**, *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Writing a Novel*

Self-promotion by authors isn’t entirely new. Mark Twain was a notorious ham on the lecture circuit, and Charles Dickens performed paid readings by the hundreds.

— **MEG COX**, *Wall Street Journal*, August 2, 1990

[It is] mandatory for authors to contribute to their own marketing... There are a lot of shy authors out there who don’t have a marketing bone in their body. But today, we expect the authors to have the skills to sell their books. If they don’t have those skills, they should find someone who could coach them on speaking or interacting with the public.

— **JASON B. SMITH**, co-owner of Chicago’s The Book Table bookstore, quoted in *Steve Harrison’s Book Marketing Update*, September 2011

No part of the Sunday paper has suffered more in the great space famine than the book section. To most editors — hardnosed, with a strong, hard news orientation — book coverage is at best an obligation to their intellectual readers and at least an anachronistic survival from the days when people actually read books.

— **BRUCE COOK**, critic, *Washington Journalism Review*, May 1983

Silence equals death in our line of work.

— **MARTIN J. SMITH**, novelist, quoted in *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, November 1, 1998

One would expect an industry that trumpets the public's right to know, the journalist's courageous quest for truth, to celebrate the book. The expectation is not fulfilled, partly because... newspaper editors fear and resent the greater thoroughness and sophistication of books.

— **CARLIN ROMANO**, "Extra! Extra! The Sad Story of Books as News," essay in *Publishing Books*, edited by Everette E. Dennis, Craig L. LaMay and Edward C. Pease

Ruminative thought and the ability to paint a larger cultural picture get little respect.

— **KEVIN BERGER**, "The incredible vanishing book re-view," *Salon*, July 19, 2001

A newspaper discloses its view of the world clearly by what it chooses to cover and not to cover, and with what degree of rigor and pride. When you deprive the coverage of books of adequate space and talent, you are declaring that books are not important.

— "The Battle of the Book," *The New Republic*, December 10, 2007 (unsigned)

Space devoted to book reviews has shrunk dramatically in newspapers

and magazines in the past five years, while the number of books published has increased 55 percent. Publishers focus nearly all their attention on the surefire blockbusters. The result: many good books come and go unnoticed.

— **JESSICA BRILLIANT KEENER**, “Getting the Word Out,”
Boston Globe, May 2, 2011

Publishers lavish promotion on books likely to sell, written by bestseller writers.

— **JEFF LIPPMAN**, *Wall Street Journal*, September 2, 1997

Everyone else pretty much has to fend for himself.

— **ROBERT CRAIS**, mystery novelist, quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*, September 2, 1997

No matter how prestigious or enthusiastic your publisher is, your book probably won't be treated the way it should be. It's not that publishers don't want to support your books, or that they don't know how to generate sales; it's just that they don't have enough staff and money to give each book the attention it needs and deserves. As a result, most general-interest titles fizzle out fast. That's why smart authors get involved.

— **JUDITH APPELBAUM and FLORENCE JANOVIC**, *The Writer's Workbook: A Full and Friendly Guide to Boosting Your Book's Sales*

If you have a book coming out, you have to get heavily — and intelligently — involved in marketing it or prepare to see it fail.

— **JUDITH APPELBAUM**, *How To Get Happily Published*.

Interview in *WritersWrite: The Internet Writing Journal*, June 1998

Don't expect anyone to do your selling for you. That's your job.

— **JOHN KREMER**'s warning to writers, *1001 Ways to Market Your Books*

[Radio] talk shows are the best sellers of books. I had James Michener on, and I asked him why he needed to do the show since he's one of the most popular novelists in America. And he said doing talk shows helped him sell 40 percent more books. The reason is obvious: Listeners hear Michener and feel as if they have a personal relationship with him. When they go in the store and buy his book, they are buying someone they know.

— **LARRY KING**, talk show host, quoted in *U. S. News and World Report*, January 16, 1984

I believe what makes books sell, more than anything else, is word of mouth.

— **NORA EPHRON**, quoted in *Boston Sunday Globe*, May 15, 1983

Everybody sits back and prays for — gulp — good word of mouth. That's a funny way to run a business that's totally dependent on new products.

— **COLIN L. JONES**, "The Non-Marketing of Fiction," *Publishers Weekly*, March 30, 1992

The best exposure, we all say, is word-of-mouth, but that is not the primary exposure. The primary exposure can be achieved in many ways: selection by a major book club, a super-hype publicity tour, or rave reviews in the major media. The trouble with all these ways is that they're generally all available to the same very few books.

— **GEORGE BROCKMAN**, Chairman, W. W. Norton, in a paper presented at a seminar sponsored by the Center for the Book, April 25, 1980

The public buys bestsellers that are heavily advertised and publicized, just as they buy any product that is made highly visible.

— **STANLEY J. CORWIN**, *How to Become a Bestselling Author*

A new book is just like any new product, like a detergent. You have to acquaint people with it. They have to know it's there. You only get to be number one when the public knows about you.

— **JACQUELINE SUSANN**, quoted in *Lovely Me: The Life of Jacqueline Susann* by Barbara Seaman

No amount of promotion will sell a book that has no appeal.

— **BERNARD GEIS**, publisher, quoted in *Stranger Than Naked or How to Write Dirty Books for Fun and Profit* by Mike McGrady

It's an industry based on serendipity. With the exception of the big-name authors, where you can predict sales relatively well, with many of the other new books you just don't know how well they're going to do. So you put a lot of resources behind the big books.

— **M. J. ROSE**, "The Writing Pit and the Pendulum," *Huffington*

Post, March 21, 2011

I think the big myth in this business is that quality will win out, that cream will rise to the top. It's a misconception that I labored under when I was first getting into the business... What I learned is that the whole industry is driven by what I call The Big Push. Every publishing house sits down a few months prior to publication of its next list and makes a decision about which books get The Big Push. Very often, it's the books that they pay the most money for.

— **RICK HORGAN**, HarperCollins executive editor, in *Book Editors Talk to Writers*, edited by Judy Mandell

In trade publishing, people read because publishing hype has made them want to read a book. Demand is created; thus the marketing of a trade book is in part the stimulation of interest rather than, as in scholarly publishing, the tapping of a pre-existing interest.

— **IRVING LOUIS HOROWITZ**, president, Transaction/Society and **MARY E. CURTIS**, editor-in-chief, Praeger Publishing, *The Nation*, June 3, 1978

Publicity will sell nothing unless people want it.

— **WILLIAM PARKHURST**, *How to Get Publicity*

Few nonfiction bestsellers were ever created or manufactured from remote subjects.

— **STANLEY J. CORWIN**, *How to Become a Bestselling Author*

It's impossible really to know what the public likes. The public's too

fickle.

— **MALCOLM COWLEY**, literary critic and historian

I've never quite bought the idea that the public buys or takes what it deserves. I think that... publishers to a measurable extent dictate public tastes. They're really more powerful than we want to admit.

— **VAN ALLEN BRADLEY**, literary critic, quoted in
Conversations by Roy Newquist

The truth is that when it comes to predicting which books will succeed in the marketplace, publishing people are close to clueless... Outside of books written by a few brand-name authors, what readers will choose to buy is nearly impossible to anticipate.

— **RALPH KEYES**, *The Writer's Book of Hope*

I suspect that if any current product, be it an automobile, a vacuum cleaner, or whatever, were to be honestly described, there would be few takers. Books are no exceptions. You cannot permit them to come barefaced into being. They must be cosmetized, bewigged, perfumed, given padding where needed for the sake of appearance.

— **DONALD MACCAMPBELL**, *The Writing Business*

If you can't describe a book in one or two pithy sentences that would make you or my mother want to read it, then of course you can't sell it.

— **MICHAEL KORDA**, editor-in-chief, Simon & Schuster,
quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*, June 26, 1984

When e-mailing the media, try to keep your pitch to five or six sentences

and you're more likely to capture the media's attention. How much information should you include in a pitch e-mail? Send the essentials: your idea, credentials, and contact information. A great concept and brief e-mail will get them interested in you. When it comes to pitching, send the appetizer. Save the entrée.

— **STEVE HARRISON**, “Steve & Bill Harrison’s Reporter Connection,” March 19, 2012

Simon & Schuster runs a sales contest every year. The winners get to keep their jobs.

— **JACK O’LEARY**, former Simon & Schuster sales representative, half-joking about the company’s approach to sales, *Newsweek*, July 24, 1984

One of the wonderful, sad and desperate things about this business is that nobody really knows how to sell books.

— **ROGER STRAUS III**, publishing executive, quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*, August 2, 1990

Never, ever chase a reviewer to ask if they’ve read your book. It’s very bad manners and will not help at all.

— **DIANE KLIMPTON**, “How Can Indie Authors Get Their Books Reviewed?,” July 14, 2003,
<http://selfpublishingadvice.org/blog/how-can-indie-authors-get-their-books-reviewed-a-reviewer-replies/>

∞ BOOK PUBLICITY & MARKETING: BLURBS ∞

When a book comes into print today, suddenly there are ten false witnesses to testify it is the greatest which has ever appeared.

— **ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER**, short story writer and novelist,
quoted in the *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1970

An effective blurb... will generally be used again in promotional pieces, advertising, [and] sell copy — and believe it or not — in review columns describing the book.

— **STANLEY J. CORWIN**, *How to Become a Bestselling Author*

Outside of the major metropolitan areas, reviewers tend to rewrite jacket copy [which sometimes include blurbs] or the publisher's press release.

— **JOHN GREGORY DUNNE**, *Esquire*, February 1987

Flap copy... serves as a crutch for lazy reviewers; good flap copy will be repeated in “review” after “review” around the country.

— **HUGH RAWSON**, “The Editor's Role in Marketing,” *Trade Book Marketing: A Practical Guide*, edited by Robert A. Carter

Any person furnishing a blurb for a book jacket... (should) be required to disclose his connections to the author of the book.

— **CALVIN TRILLIN**, *Uncivil Liberties*, facetiously proposing an
“Open Blurb Law” to stop the misuse of blurbs

∞ CREATING CONTROVERSY ∞

Artists are meant to be madmen, to disturb and shock us.

— **ANNE RICE**, novelist, quoted in the *Seattle Times*, December 13, 1990

Any authentic work of art must start an argument between the artist and his audience.

— **REBECCA WEST**, *The Court and the Castle*

If a book stirs up violent opposition and equally partisan feeling in support of its point of view, the probabilities are that it has deeply affected the thinking of people.

— **ROBERT B. DOWNS**, *Books That Changed the World*

It is advantageous to an author that his book should be attacked as well as praised. Fame is a shuttlecock. If it be struck at only one end of the room, it will soon fall to the ground. To keep it up, it must be struck at both ends.

— **SAMUEL JOHNSON**, quoted in *The Crown Treasury of Relevant Quotations* by Edward F. Murphy

You can be denounced from the heavens, and it only makes people interested.

— **TOM WOLFE**, journalist

To brand a book with infamy is to insure its sale.

— **JAMES RIDLEY**, *The History of James Lovegrove*

If you are not sometimes attacked, then you cannot be very good... the attack itself is a certification of worth.

— **JOHN GREGORY DUNNE**, *Esquire*, February 1987

That will sell 25,000 books for sure!

— **MARK TWAIN**'s reaction to the Concord, Massachusetts, library's banning of *Huckleberry Finn*. 1885 letter to Charles L. Webster, his nephew and head of his publishing company. Quoted in *Mark My Words* by Mark Dawidziak.

What is freedom of expression? Without the freedom to offend, it ceases to exist.

— **SALMAN RUSHDIE**, quoted in *Weekend Guardian*, February 10, 1990

They condemn what they do not understand.

— **MARCUS FABIVS QUINTILIANUS**, Roman rhetorician, *Quintilian's Institutes of Oratory, or, Education of an Orator*

The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its shame.

— **OSCAR WILDE**, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

The cleverly expressed opposite of any generally accepted idea is worth a fortune to somebody.

— **F. SCOTT FITZGERALD**, *The Notebooks of F. Scott Fitzgerald*

To be sure, the attention was mixed, and more than a little skepticism

accompanied the first news about the diaries' discovery and their immediate publication. Nothing sells like controversy, though, and it quickly became clear that the market could make good use of any early doubts that were to be raised about the authenticity of the new Hitler material.

— **ALLAN H. ROSENFELD**, *Imagining Hitler*, commenting on the forged Hitler diaries forgery

With the cost of book production ever on the rise, fewer risks can be taken; the quiet writer must defer to the shocking and outrageous.

— **NONA BALAKIN**, *Critical Encounters*

Get them talking, even if it's all negative word of mouth. What do you care as long as they spell your name right?

— **JOHN WATERS**, filmmaker, *National Lampoon*, May 1985

When a thing ceases to be a subject of controversy, it ceases to be a subject of interest.

— **WILLIAM HAZLITT**, *Collected Works*

∞ CREATIVITY ∞

I'm constantly amazed how creative a lot of people are who aren't in the creative fields. I sometimes think that we in the so-called arts think we have a lock on sensitivity and creativity. And hell, a guy comes to the house to paint a fence, and when you talk to him and watch him work, you suddenly realize that he, in his own way, is as creative and sensitive as anybody you're working with in the so-called arts.

— **NORMAN LEAR**, producer, quoted in *How The Great Comedy Writers Create Laughter* by Larry Wilde

The reality of the creative process is that it often requires persistence, the ability to stare at a problem until it makes sense... The answer won't arrive suddenly, in a flash of insight. Instead, it will be revealed slowly, gradually emerging after great effort.

— **JONAH LEHRER**, *Imagine: How Creativity Works*

(*Definition*) It's the ability to see things in a new way, and from that insight to produce something that didn't exist before — something original.

— **BILL MOYERS**, journalist

∞ CRITICS ∞

You're there to be shot at, and that's part of it.

— **NORMAN MAILER**, novelist

After something is published, all I want to read or hear is praise. Anything less is a bore.

— **TRUMAN CAPOTE**, quoted in *The Paris Review*,
Spring/Summer 1957

Some reviews give pain. This is regrettable, but no author has any right to whine. He is not obliged to be an author. He invited publicity, and he must take the publicity that comes along.

— **E. M. FORSTER**, in *The Author*, Summer 1943

Vigorous criticism stings, but I've learned that if the critic hadn't taken me seriously, he wouldn't have put so much energy into the mugging.

— **JOHN LONG**, *Writer's Little Book of Wisdom*

The important thing is that you make sure that neither the favorable nor the unfavorable critics move into your head and take part in the composition of your next work.

— **THORNTON WILDER**, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Winter
1957

There's only one person a writer should listen to, pay any attention to. It's not any damn critic. It's the reader.

— **WILLIAM STYRON**, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Spring

1954

The public is the only critic whose judgment is worth anything all... Many wiser and better men than you poo-pooed Shakespeare, even as late as two centuries ago; but that old party has outlived these people.

— **MARK TWAIN**, *Autobiography*, edited by Albert Bigelow Paine

It is not the critic who counts, nor the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena.

— **THEODORE ROOSEVELT**, President, speech delivered at the University of Paris, Sorbonne, April 23, 1910

Many critics are like woodpeckers who, instead of enjoying the fruit and shadow of a tree, hop incessantly around the trunk pecking holes in the bark to discover some little worm or other.

— **HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW**, poet, quoted in *The Literary Life and Other Curiosities* by Robert Hendrickson

Certainly America is not overrun by great literary critics. The way I feel about reviews — my career has really been made by them, because I have gotten mostly good reviews. I am always happy to get good reviews because I want people to buy my books. But by and large, with some exceptions, your good reviews are usually as stupid as your bad reviews.

— **FRAN LEBOWITZ**, humorist, 1983 interview by William A. Gordon, Akron *Buchtelite*

Good reviews do get written, but most book reviewing in this country is mediocre, and quite possibly always will be. The people who do reviewing do it as a bit of work peripheral to work that is more truly at the center of their lives.

— **JOSEPH EPSTEIN**, *Plausible Prejudices*

In literary criticism there are no criteria, no accepted standards of excellence by which to test the work.

— **AMBROSE BIERCE**, *The Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce*,
Volume X

I have never kept count, but my guess is that I have had roughly three hundred reviews bestowed on books I have written. From these three hundred or so reviews I have learned nothing, either about my books or about my quality as a writer.

— **JOSEPH EPSTEIN**, *Plausible Prejudices*

When a writer spends years of his life writing a book, you owe it to him to say, “With the best will in the world, I tried to read this and failed, and here’s why,” not sit on some judgment seat.

— **NORMAN MAILER**, novelist, quoted in *New York*, February
3, 1986

As a reviewer, I’ve always tried to ask: “What did this author set out to do, and how well did he or she do it?” instead of “What do I think this author ought to have set out to do?”

— **JANICE HARAYDA**, former book editor, Cleveland’s *Plain Dealer*, July 19, 1987

The best literary critic is the one who understands what the author was unable, for one reason or another, to write; and understanding this, is able to more appreciatively evaluate what the author was able to achieve.

— **PAUL HORGAN**, *Approaches to Writing*

The most important function (of the critic) is to make known good things that are around so that people want to read them.

— **MARY GORDON**, novelist, quoted in *Commonweal*, May 9, 1980

A critic is a man who expects miracles.

— **JAMES GIBBONS HUNEKER**, *Iconoclasts*

Pay no attention to what the critics say; no statue has ever been put up to a critic.

— **JEAN SIBELIUS**, Finnish composer, after an English critic called Sibelius's Seventh Symphony a failure

You know who the critics are? — the men who have failed in literature and art.

— **BENJAMIN DISRAELI**, *Lothar*

Little old ladies of both sexes.

— **JOHN O'HARA**, novelist, original source unknown

He who would write and can't write, can surely review.

— **JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL**, *A Fable for Critics*

The most unrestrained attacks have usually been directed at writers who

succeed in reaching an enormous audience.

— **MYRICK LAND**, *The Fine Art of Literary Mayhem*

There are perhaps a hundred writers in America who make a living from writing fiction... You can count them, really, on just a few people's hands. This, by the way, accounts for the viciousness of the criticism that commercially successful writers receive. It accounts for it almost better than anything because the only word to explain it is "envy," really.

— **ERICA JONG**, quoted in *Interviews with Contemporary Novelists* by Diana Cooper-Clark

I have long felt that any reviewer who expresses rage and loathing for a novel is preposterous. He or she is like a person who has put on full armor and attacked a hot fudge sundae or banana split.

— **KURT VONNEGUT**, quoted in *Rotten Reviews: A Literary Companion*, edited by Bill Henderson

Authors must be the only craftsmen in the world who have to submit to the criticism of inexperienced or incompetent people. A surgeon is not obliged to listen to the complaints of a student walking the wards for the first time, nor is he subjected to the rebukes of men whose patients have perished under their knives.

— **ST. JOHN ERVINE**, quoted in *The Author*, Summer 1943

There are some books which cannot be adequately reviewed for twenty or thirty years after they come out.

— **JOHN MORLEY**, *Recollections*

When the critics come around it's always too late.

— **SIR SIDNEY NOLAN**, Australian artist, *Daily Telegraph*,
September 15, 1992

Just remember that whatever the review says, you never know how readers will react, and I've seen many cases in which the lukewarm review caused others to say they wanted to read the book for themselves.

— **PENNY C. SANSEVIERI**, *52 Ways to Sell More Books!*

I would rather be attacked than unnoticed. For the worst thing you can do to an author is to be silent as to his works.

— **SAMUEL JOHNSON**, quoted in *Life of Johnson* by James
Boswell

To escape criticism, do nothing, say nothing, be nothing.

— **ELBERT HUBBARD**, *Epigrams*

The only impeccable writers are those who never wrote.

— **WILLIAM HAZLITT**, English essayist, "On the Aristocracy
of Letters," *Table Talk*

We've got 40,000 books published each year, and 90% of them are swill.

— **JOHN LEONARD**, former *New York Times* book editor and
self-appointed "commissar of literary culture." Remark on "First
Edition," 1984.

Nothing is more painful to me than the disdain with which people treat second-rate authors, as if there were room only for first-raters.

— **CHARLES AUGUSTIN SAINTE-BEUVE**, French
writer/critic

In literature, as in love, we are astonished at what is chosen by others.

— **ANDRE MAUROIS**, French biographer

I am sitting in the smallest room in my house. I have your review in front of me. Soon it will be behind me.

— **MAX REGER**, German composer, quoted in *Lexicon of Musical Invective* by Nicolas Slonimsky

Let the reviews die of their own poison. Once or twice I've written bitter and noxious replies, then hid them in a drawer, feeling too proud to show my pain to the public. Months later, when I came across them, the whole business seemed too insignificant to bother about.

— **LYNNE SHARON SCHWARTZ**, novelist, quoted in *Poets & Writers*, July/August 1990

There is no appeals process. No way to defend yourself in the court of public opinion, nor to question the critic's qualifications.

— **STEVE ALMOND**, "A First-Timers Reveals How It Feels,"
Poets & Writers, May/June 2003

The whole business (of reviewing) is complicated, perverse, and bears little relation to common sense, need, commerce or literature.

— **JOSEPH EPSTEIN**, *Plausible Prejudices*

Never pay for a review. I am a book publicist and know from personal experience they reflect badly on the author. Media is wise to which

agencies out there are offering paid reviews and they don't do anything to build up your book. If anything, they take a book down a notch.

— **RACHEL M. ANDERSON**, RMA Publicity, post on LinkedIn discussion group, June 28, 2012

It is time — probably past time — to declare that traditional book reviews are no longer the dominant measure of a book's impact, or even necessarily the most effective way to reach the intended audience... A good review is still a satisfying coda to all the hard work that went into getting a book done. But success in today's world takes much more than praise.

— **PETER OSNOS**, "Good Book Reviews Are No Longer Enough," *The Atlantic*, April 2011

Now the publicity challenge is to get "off-the-book-page" coverage. News stories, feature stories, *People* magazine interviews, and of course, Oprah. Increasingly, reviews... don't mean jack.

— **MICHAEL WOLFF**, "Is the *New York Times Book Review* Irrelevant?," *New York* magazine, October 12, 1998

On the basis of the information at hand, we cannot say whether the frequency with which authors' books are reviewed is related to their financial return, nor can we say whether good reviews count more than bad ones.

— Professors **PAUL WILLIAM KINGSTON** and **JONATHAN R. COLE**, "Economic and Social Aspects of the Literary Situation," *Public Opinion Quarterly*. (The authors also concluded that "being reviewed has little relation to earning a respectable

income.”)

∞ EDITORS ∞

An editor should have a pimp for a brother, so he'd have somebody to look up to.

— Attributed to **GENE FOWLER**, journalist/novelist

No passion on earth, neither love or hate, is equal to the passion to alter someone else's draft.

— **H. G. WELLS**, quoted in *How to Enjoy Writing* by Janet and Isaac Isamov

Reviewers will crucify an author for spelling, punctuation and continuity errors that should have been easily caught.

— **VICKIE DOLD**, publicist, Daring Books, on LinkedIn's Book Publicity and Marketing forum, March 3, 2013

If you want to do a good job of editing your book, you need to print it out. Yes, I'm serious. Print it on actual paper, seize a red pen and you won't believe what you'll see that you didn't see before.

— **BELINDA POLLARD**, Australian book consultant,
www.smallbluedog.com/about/about-belinda-pollard, March 23,
2012

There is no one else an author can trust to be impartial and honest about his or her writing.

— **OLGA LITOWINSKY**, editor, *Publishers Weekly*, April 5,
1985

They can cast new and different beams of light on your work, and highlight things that you haven't really thought of.

— **VICTOR KELLEHER**, fantasy writer, quoted in *How Writers Write* by Pamela Lloyd

I see my role as helping the writer to realize his or her intention.

— **FAITH SALE**, vice president, G. P. Putnam's Sons, "Editing Fiction," *Editors on Editing*, edited by Gerald Gross

Writing is a two-person job. Even if you are a skilled editor of your own work, a second skilled editor will make suggestions you will inevitably miss, simply because, as the author, you lose a certain amount of objectivity.

— **SUSAN PAGE**, *The Shortest Distance Between You and a Published Book*

I cannot think of anybody who doesn't need an editor, even though some people claim they don't.

— **TONI MORRISON**, novelist and editor

Even Noble Laureates can benefit from the comments of a good editor.

— **COLLEEN MCCULLOUGH**, novelist

Would you try to sell your car without washing it, or your house without tidying it? Your manuscript or proposal is a product that you are trying to sell to a publisher, so make it a quality product.

— **STEWART FERRIS**, *How to Get Published: Secrets from the Inside*

Editors are extremely fallible people, all of them. Don't put too much trust in them.

— **MAXWELL PERKINS**, editor

Bow down before them. They know what they are doing.

— **QUENTIN CRISP**, *Quentin Crisp's Book of Quotations*, edited by Amy Appleby

Editors often made me think of giant grasshoppers, the way they hop from place to place. Fully aware of the fact that they are more poorly paid than most garbage collectors, they must be constantly on the watch for some new spot that offers a better deal.

— **DONALD MACCAMPBELL**, *The Writing Business*

If an editor lasts one year at a publishing house, I'm happy — honestly.

— **JEAN NAGGAR**, agent, explaining why she urges her clients to complete their books as soon as possible. Quoted in *The Writing Business: A Poets & Writers Handbook*.

The most important friend a book has is the editor who acquired it... Because enthusiasm is the most important attitude in the publishing process, as long as that editor remains in place, you can expect a certain measure of commitment to see a book through, to ignite company enthusiasm, talk the book up to the trade, push the salespeople — and if nothing else, make the author feel that someone is watching over his or her baby... The departure of an editor is a traumatic event in the life of a book.

— **RICHARD CURTIS**, *This Business of Publishing*

The manuscript you submit (should not) contain any flaws that you can identify — it is up to the writer to do the work, rather than counting on some stranger in Manhattan to do it for him.

— **RICHARD NORTH PATTERSON**, quoted in *Writer's Digest*,
August 1994

It was not long ago that the prevailing attitude among editors was, “This book has some problems, but the author is so talented that I’d like to buy it and work with him.” Today such words are rarely heard. A book with problems is a book rejected, and more and more one hears editors say, “Let the author revise, then we’ll decide if we want to buy it.”

— **RICHARD CURTIS**, literary agent, “Are Editors Necessary?”,
in *Editors on Editing*, third edition, edited by Gerald Gross

By and large, the novels we buy are 95 percent ready for publication. We don’t have the time to do much else with twenty-four or more books in production a year and reading on average two to three manuscripts a week, on top of all the line editing, conferences, and other work that has to be done.

— **PETER RUBIE**, “An Editor Speaks From The Trenches,” *The Writer*, September 1992

See also “[Revisions](#).”

∞ FAME ∞

The best kind of fame is a writer's fame. Just enough to get a good table at a restaurant, and not enough for someone to interrupt you while you are eating.

— **FRAN LEBOWITZ**, quoted in *Us* magazine, August 1993

You must be prepared to work always without applause.

— **ERNEST HEMINGWAY**, quoted in *Blow Us Away!*

Publishers' Secrets for Successful Manuscripts by E. Keith Howick

If you want a place in the sun, you've got to expect a few blisters.

— Anonymous. Quoted in *The World's Best Thoughts on Success & Failure* compiled by Eugene Raudsepp

∞ FOOTNOTES ∞

(*Definition*) Scholarly barbed wire.

— **EDMUND WILSON**, literary critic, quoted in *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, December 4, 1973

Readers are like sheep. If there's any gate to the right or left, they'll take it. You must, therefore, always keep them on the path.

— **PETER JACOBI**, journalism professor, Indiana University

Don't use footnotes as a junkyard for all the words you cut from the text but couldn't bear to part with. Footnotes can be distracting, ugly, and they frequently work against you because the reader can't remember what he knows from the text and what he knows from the footnotes.

— **GARY PROVOST**, *100 Ways to Improve Your Writing*

∞ FREELANCE WRITERS ∞

(*Definition*) One who gets paid per word, per piece, or perhaps.

— **ROBERT BENCHLEY**, American humorist, quoted in
Selected Letters of James Thurber, edited by H. Thurber and J.
Weeks

∞ GENIUS ∞

(*Definition*) A fellow who is a crackpot, until he hits the jackpot.

— Unknown

(*Definition*) A man who is ahead of his time, but behind in his rent.

— Unknown

(*Definition*) One who shoots at something no one else can see, and hits it.

— Unknown

Every man of genius sees the world at a different angle from his fellows.

— **HAVELOCK ELLIS**, *The Dance of Life*

True genius resides in the capacity for evaluation of uncertain, hazardous and conflicting information.

— **WINSTON CHURCHILL**, British Prime Minister

Great geniuses have the shortest biographies. Their cousins can tell you nothing about them.

— **RALPH WALDO EMERSON**, *Representative Men*

Talent — genius, if you will — survives the most stringent oppression. Quality and distinction are in almost all cases recognized eventually. It's only a matter of luck and timing (but the timing, unfortunately, can be way off).

— **WILLIAM McPHERSON**, *The Nation*, October 3, 1981

Genius, in fact, may be defined as the ability to control luck.

— **LANCE MORROW**, *Time* essayist

The public is wonderfully tolerant. It forgives everything except genius.

— **OSCAR WILDE**, *The Critic as Artist*

It's no fun being a genius when you are the only one who knows about it.

— A writer who prefers to remain anonymous

There is no great genius without some touch of madness.

— **SENECA**, quoting Aristotle, *On Tranquility and the Mind*

I don't know who was the more appalled; my former teachers, who refused to believe it, or my family, who didn't want to believe it.

— **TRUMAN CAPOTE**, novelist, describing reactions to the determination that his IQ was in the genius category, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Spring/Summer 1957

Genius... (gets) its possessors into trouble of all kinds.

— **SAMUEL BUTLER**, *Genius*

In the republic of mediocrity, genius is dangerous.

— **ROBERT G. INGERSOLL**, lawyer, quoted in *Barnes & Noble Book of Quotations*, edited by Robert I. Fitzhenry

It is impossible that a genius — at least a literary genius — can ever be discovered by his intimates; they are so close to him that he is out of focus to them... They can't get a perspective on him, and it is only by

perspective that difference between him and the rest of their limited circle can be perceived.

— **MARK TWAIN**, quoted in *Mark Twain in Eruption*, edited by Bernard DeVoto

The world has a standing pique against genius.

— **WILLIAM HAZLITT**, *The Ruling Passion*

When a true genius appears in the world, you may know him by this sign, that the dunces are all in confederacy against him.

— **JONATHAN SWIFT**, *Thoughts on Various Subjects*

A Confederacy of Dunces

— Title of a tragicomic novel by **JOHN KENNEDY TOOLE**, who, according to his mother, committed suicide because he could not find a publisher. Twelve years after his death, the book won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

See also “[Talent](#).”

∞ GRAMMAR ∞

It's not enough to tell a great story, share an original idea, or create an intriguing poem; writers are also obligated to pay diligence to the craft... Bad grammar is a distraction... Each mistake or incorrect construction will momentarily yank readers out of the story. Sure, they can jump back in, but it makes for a negative or unpleasant reading experience.

— **MELISSA DONOVAN**, writing coach, “Ten Grammar Rules and the Best Writing Practices That Every Writer Should Know,” April 17, 2012, www.writingforward.com/grammar/grammar-rules/ten-grammar-rules-and-best-writing-practices-that-every-writer-should-know#more-13554

If you persist in writing “Good food at it’s best,” you deserve to be struck by lightning, hacked up on the spot and buried in an unmarked grave.

— **LYNNE TRUSS**, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*

Information about proper grammar usage can be found on the Internet. Two good sites are Dr.Grammar.org and the Purdue OWL (online writing lab). Some good print handbooks can be found in bookstores. The most popular is *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White.

— **DR. GRAMMAR**, July 19, 2012, e-mail to William A. Gordon

I would refer the writer to “A Pocket Style Manual” by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers (Bedford/St. Martins), now in its sixth edition. I

think it answers most common questions clearly, accurately, and accessibly.

— **RICHARD DUTTON**, Humanities Distinguished Professor and Chair, Department of English, Ohio State University, July 19, 2012, e-mail to William A. Gordon

Perfect grammar has nothing to do with great writing. Certainly, I will admit that people who are better at grammar often have more sensitivity for the nuance of language — and tend to be better writers — but for the most part, facility with grammar has nothing to do with storytelling talent.

— **JANE FRIEDMAN**, “Why I Don’t Care About Grammar (And Why You Should Stop Worrying),” June 21, 2010, www.writersdigest.com/editor-blogs/there-are-no-rules/general/why-i-dont-care-about-grammar-and-why-you-should-stop-worrying

If all the grammarians in the world were placed end to end, it would be a good thing.

— Unknown

∞ HISTORY ∞

By whom is the real history being written today? — by whom has most of it been written in recent years? To an overwhelming extent, by the men and women furthest removed from the deadly touch of the academic glossologists... By far the larger number of our best historical writers are to be found outside academic lines.

— **ALLAN NEVINS**, *Gateway to History*

Perhaps the academic historian suffers from having a captive audience, first in the supervisor of his dissertation, then in the lecture hall. Keeping the reader turning the page has not been his primary concern.

— **BARBARA TUCHMAN**, *Practicing History*

When historians neglect the literary aspect of their discipline — and they forget that good history begins with a good story — they risk losing the wider audience that all great historians have addressed. They end up, sadly, talking to themselves.

— **JAMES WEST DAVIDSON and MARK HAMILTON
LYTTLE**, *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection*

History is not just scholarship. It is a branch of literature. The historian who presents information unadorned by art has done only half his job.

— **ORVILLE PRESCOTT**, *History as Literature*

The history that lies inert in unread books does no work in the world.

— **CARL BECKER**, *American Historical Review*, January 1932

What good is their knowledge if it is merely to be passed around in a small circle of them?

— **PAGE SMITH**, historian, quoted in *Publishers Weekly*, June 21, 1985

Is it not time that we scholars began to earn our keep in the world? Thanks to a gullible public, we have been honored, flattered, even paid, for producing the largest number of inconsequential studies in the history of civilization.

— **HOWARD ZINN**, *The Politics of History*

When students and school boards ask Why history? What are we supposed to be getting out of this? The best answer is still that one word: judgment. We demand it of all professionals: doctors, lawyers, chefs and quarterbacks. And we need it most in the profession of citizenship, which, like it or not, exercise it or not, we are all born into.

— **PAUL GAGNON**, “Why Study History,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, November 1988

People want to know about the past because they want to know how they came to be who they are, and how things came to be as they are... History — the study of the past — tells us how we got into the mess we are in.

— **MILTON HIMMELFARB**, *Commentary*, August 1970

Every one of the social sciences has its own contribution to make to the knowledge of man. The contribution of history is perspective.

— **DAVID S. LANDES and CHARLES TILLEY**, *History as a*

Social Science

The value of history, then, is that it teaches us what man has done and thus what is.

— **R. G. COLLINGWOOD**, *The Idea of History*

History... helps people to learn something of themselves, perhaps in the way that a psychoanalyst seeks to help a patient.

— **DAVID HACKETT FISCHER**, *Historians' Fallacies*

Like all sciences, history, to be worthy to itself and beyond itself, must concentrate on one thing: the search for truth.

— **G. R. ELTON**, *The Practice of History*

We necessarily look to professional historians to help us sort out the differences between fact and fiction.

— **ALLAN H. ROSENFELD**, *Imagining Hitler*

The scholar is the guardian of memories... Where scholarship decays myths will crowd in.

— **E. H. GOMBRICH**, art historian

History is too serious to be left to the historians.

— **IAN MACLEOD**, *The Observer*, July 16, 1961

It requires an impartial man to make a good historian; but it is the partial and one-sided who hunt out the materials.

— **JOHN ACTON**, *English historian*

Actually, partisanship often adds zest for historical writing; for partisanship is an expression of interest and excitement and passion, and these can stir the reader as judiciousness might not.

— **HENRY STEELE COMMAGER**, *The Study of History*

What makes a good writer of history is a guy who is suspicious. It marks the real differences between the man who wants to write honest history and the one who'd rather write a good story.

— **JAMES BISHOP**, journalist, original source unknown

The secret of historical composition is to know what to neglect.

— **LORD BRYCE**, *Biographical Studies*

The chief problem in historical honesty is not outright dishonesty. It is omission or deemphasis of important data. The definition of important, of course, depends on one's values.

— **HOWARD ZINN**, *Declarations of Independence: Cross-Examining American Ideology*

The function of the historian is to be constantly correcting and completing the image of the past.

— **DONALD M. DOZER**, quoted in *The Vital Past: Writings on the Uses of History* by Stephen Vaughn

History is an argument without end.

— Common expression used by historians

That depends, Henry, on who writes the history.

— **RICHARD NIXON** President, to Secretary of State Henry

Kissinger after announcing his resignation on August 8, 1974.
According to *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, Nixon made this remark after Kissinger tried to console him by saying that history would judge him as one of the greatest presidents. Nixon understood that he could do what Winston Churchill did: influence history by writing it himself.

History will be kind to me, for I intend to write it.

— **WINSTON CHURCHILL**, quoted by Richard Nixon to Barbara Walters, May 8, 1985

No one has the right to distort the past; no fact, however disagreeable, may be expunged from the record.

— **WILLIAM MANCHESTER**, journalist and historian, *Look*, April 4, 1967

He who tampers with the memory of mankind is a moral criminal.

— **JAMES T. FARRELL**, *James T. Farrell: Literary Essays, 1954-1977*, collected and edited by Jack Alan Robbins

Someone once said that only by coming to grips with our past can we hope to understand the present. True or not, it's a catchy little phrase.

— **PETER GAFFNEY**, humorist, *National Lampoon*, March 1984

See also [“Research” and “Scholarship.”](#)

∞ HUMOR ∞

I keep telling young writers I meet that if they want the sure road to success, for heaven's sake, write something that will make people laugh.

— **BENNETT CERF**, publisher, quoted in *Counterpoint*,
compiled and edited by Roy Newquist

Any pundit of even moderate paunch can instruct the Israelites and the Arabs on achieving peace in the Middle East. But to write funny — to write pieces that consistently produce the chuckle or the haw-haw — requires genius of a high order.

— **JAMES J. KILPATRICK**, *The Writer's Art*

Humor is the secret weapon of the nonfiction writer. It is secret because so few writers realize that it is often their best tool — and sometimes their only tool — for making an important point.

— **WILLIAM ZINSSER**, *On Writing Well*

(Humorists) are as serious in purpose as Hemingway or Faulkner — in fact, a national asset in forcing the country to see itself clearly. To them humor is urgent work. It's an attempt to say important things in a special way that regular writers aren't getting said in a regular way — or if they are, it's so regular that nobody is reading it.

— **WILLIAM ZINSSER**, *On Writing Well*

Humor is one of the ways I cope with the problem of writing novels that generally deal with extremely serious, morbid situations.

— **JOSEPH HELLER**, quoted in *U. S. News and World Report*,

November 12, 1984

In Jewish humor comedy and tragedy are joined together like Siamese twins. “Laughter through tears” is what the Jewish philosopher chooses to call it. You laugh in order to give yourself courage not to grieve; and you shed a tear or two because the human comedy is often no mere laughing matter.

— **NATHAN AUSUBEL**, introduction, *A Treasury of Jewish Humor*

The secret source of humor itself is not joy but sorrow.

— **MARK TWAIN**, *The Mysterious Stranger*

Comedy is tragedy plus time.

— Various attributed

We respect a person with a sense of humor because a sense of humor means you are in control of a situation. If something can be going terribly wrong and you can find humor in it, it means you are not intimidated by it, and the inference is you can handle it.

— **ROBERT ORBEN**, gag writer, interview by William A. Gordon, *Akron Beacon Journal*, April 17, 1983

The raw material [of humor] is tragedy... It is therefore absurd to assume that there can be such a thing as subject matter totally off-limits to the humorist or comedian.

— **STEVE ALLEN**, *Funny People*

Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand.

— **MARK TWAIN**, *The Mysterious Stranger*

Truly good humor... is bound to offend, for in the nature of things, it ridicules our prejudices and popular institutions.

— **MORDECAI RICHLER**, introduction, *The Best of Modern Humor*

There must be courage; there must be no awe... There must be a disciplined eye and a wild mind.

— **DOROTHY PARKER**'s definition of humor, original source unknown

Generally speaking, I don't believe in kindly humor — I don't think it exists. One of the most shameful utterances to stem from the human mouth is Will Rogers's "I never met a man I didn't like."

— **S. J. PERELMAN**, quoted in *Conversations with S. J. Perelman* by Sidney Joseph Perelman

Humor is an affirmation of dignity, a declaration of man's superiority to all that befalls him.

— **ROMAIN GARY**, *Promise at Dawn*

Humor is just another defense against the universe.

— **MEL BROOKS**, filmmaker, quoted in *Barnes & Noble Book of Quotations*, edited by Robert I. Fitzhenry

Laughter is part of the human survival kit.

— **DAVID NATHAN**, *The Laughtermakers*

Now I know laughter is the only correct response. Laughter is self-healing. Laughter is the way I have always borne things... Long ago, I discovered laughter is a way of healing your own pain.

— **NORA EPHRON**, director, screenwriter, journalist and novelist, referring to her painful divorce from Carl Bernstein, which she turned into the novel and screenplay *Heartburn*

You have a mongrel perception of humor, nothing more; a multitude of you possess that. This multitude sees the comic side of a thousand low-grade and trivial things — broad incongruities, mainly; grotesqueries, absurdities, evokers of the horselaugh. The ten thousand high-grade comicalities which exist in the world are sealed from their dull vision.

— **MARK TWAIN**, *The Mysterious Stranger*

There are some great, great humorists sniveling in the bulrushes of America, hiding from their natural enemy, all those unappreciative clods who never get the point of either wild or sophisticated humor. More Americans go to college than ever before, and yet fewer Americans than ever before have the necessary modicum of education and refinement of taste and wit to appreciate. In blunt terms, it means they don't get the joke so they don't buy the book so that not-so-dumb publisher stops publishing them and the geniuses either never get into print or they don't stay there long.

— **WILLIAM PETER BLATTY**, novelist, quoted in *Counterpoint* by Roy Newquist

If I think it's funny, it's funny. I don't ever try to think, does anyone think it's funny?

— **FRAN LEBOWITZ**, humorist

I think most of the people you talk to in the humor business had a very unhappy childhood. I once asked George Abbot what he thought made for a creative person and he said, “An unhappy childhood.” It makes you go into fantasy very early in life.

— **ART BUCHWALD**, humorist, quoted in *How the Great Comedy Writers Create Laughter* by Larry Wilde

Did your parents ever beat you when you were a child?

— A question **WILLIAM A. GORDON** asked Fran Lebowitz during an interview. (After Lebowitz said she did not understand the question, Gordon said: “I was really asking why you are funny... See, I thought you were going to answer: “What’s a childhood?” or something like that.” Lebowitz insisted: “They did not beat me as a child or as an adult.”)

There is a very thin line that divides the comic writer from the mass murderer, and you know, I really have that impulse all the time. So I guess writing or making wisecracks and jokes is a way of not ending up in prison.

— **FRAN LEBOWITZ**, interview in *Contemporary Authors*, May 25, 1983

A humorist entertains his readers. A satirist makes them think.

— **RICHARD ARMOUR**, humorist, quoted in *Literary Voices* by Jeffrey M. Elliot

The difference between humor and satire is largely in their purpose. The purpose of humor is to provide the reader with pleasure and relaxation. The purpose of satire is to point out something that is wrong, perhaps even endangering the human race.

— **RICHARD ARMOUR**, humorist

See also “[Satire](#)” and “[Wit](#).”

∞ THE IMPORTANCE OF BOOKS ∞

All books are divisible into two classes; the book of the hour and the books of all time.

— **JOHN RUSKIN**, *Sesame and Lilies*

All that mankind has done, thought or been: it is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of books.

— **THOMAS CARLYLE**, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*

Books still offer the most complete kind of understanding, and they last.

— **BOB WOODWARD**, author and *Washington Post* reporter

Books through the ages have earned humanity's high regard as semi-sacred objects.

— **RICHARD KLUGER**, *The Nation*, June 3, 1978

Books are the carriers of civilization.

— **BARBARA TUCHMAN**, historian, "The Book," lecture at the Library of Congress, October 17, 1979

Books are a form of immortality. The words of men whose bodies are dust still live in their books... All the great lives that have been lived have been told about in books.

— **WILFRED A. PETERSON**, *The Art of Living Day By Day*

Clearly, books can be forces for both good and bad... Books are dynamic and powerful instruments, tools and weapons.

— **ROBERT B. DOWNS**, *Books That Changed the World*

Books are weapons in the war of ideas.

— Motto of the Council on Books in Wartime

[Books are] weapons for man's freedom.

— **FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT**, President, "Message to the Booksellers of America," May 6, 1942

Certain books have exerted a profound influence on history, culture, civilization and scientific thought throughout recorded time... In every historical era, we find overwhelming evidence of the power of the written word, without which a high state of civilization and culture is inconceivable in any time or place.

— **ROBERT B. DOWNS**, *Books That Changed the World*

Books are items of commerce offered for sale in public places. They are not sacred texts brought down from the mountains by gods and heroes.

— **CLARKSON N. POTTER**, *Who Does What and Why in Book Publishing*

∞ INSPIRATION ∞

If one waits for the right time to come before writing, the right time never comes.

— **JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL**, *letter to Charles Eliot Norton*,
April 22, 1883

Writing a novel is like building a wall brick by brick; only amateurs believe in inspiration.

— **FRANK YERBY**, novelist

Writing is a craft with learned skills. There is nothing very mysterious about a lot of it. You must, to be professional, respect craftsmanship and give up mystical baloney about “inspiration” and other stuff that doesn’t exist except in the fevered imagination of a few deluded English teachers.

— **JACK M. BICKHAM**, *Writing and Selling Your Novel*

I don’t think writing is about getting inspired, I think it’s about writing consistently, getting to your desk or your room, even if you’re not feeling well, even if you don’t want to.

— **SARA DAVIDSON**, quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*, April 22,
1999

I write when I’m inspired, and I see to it that I’m inspired at nine o’clock every morning.

— **PETER DE VRIES**, novelist, quoted in *The Writer*, June 1994

∞ JOURNALISM ∞

Journalism becomes literature when it tells us not just what happened but what it was like.

— **L. S. KLEPP**, *Entertainment Weekly*, August 22/29, 1997

Journalism encourages haste... and haste is the enemy of art.

— **JEANNETTE WINTERSON**, *Art Objects*

Reporting — which can be admirable in itself — is poles apart from shaping concepts into imagined actions and requires a totally different ordering of mind and language.

— **THORNTON WILDER**, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Winter 1957

Reportage, the natural realm of those without creative imagination.

— **GORE VIDAL**, novelist, 1969 *Playboy* Interview

The only way to get through the newspaper each day, Russell Baker once wrote, is to ask, “Is this crisis really worth understanding?” Most of the time the answer is no; in the rush of daily journalism, it is difficult to distinguish the important from the merely urgent.

— **CHARLES SILBERMAN**, *Criminal Justice, Criminal Violence*

Strictly speaking, the news is informative insofar as it does indeed provide information. Therefore the questions one must ask are:

1. Do I want this information?

2. Do I need this information?
3. What do they expect me to do about it?

— **FRAN LEBOWITZ**, *Metropolitan Life*

Of course, it is not the task of the news media to crank out solutions; but with no instructions on how to incorporate what's happening close to home or far away... we feel helpless and betrayed.

— **RITA DOVE**, former Poet Laureate of the United States,
speech at the National Press Club, March 17, 1994

The business of journalism is to present facts accurately. Those seeking something larger are advised to look elsewhere.

— **ROGER ROSENBLATT**, *Time*, July 2, 1984

The press is a midden heap, full of bits and pieces of things, some of them true, and maybe valuable, but all of them fragments from which the citizen must construct his own distorted portrait of reality. I object to the idea that somehow the press, the media, are going to provide people with all the necessary answers.

— **LEWIS H. LAPHAM**, *Harper's*, January 1985

The trouble with the news business (OK, one of the troubles) is that reporters have to take seriously the words of famous and/or powerful people, even if said people ought not to be taken seriously.

— **JON MARGOLIS**, *Chicago Tribune* columnist, August 1984

It is journalistically “accurate” to report someone else’s nonsensical assertions.

— **STEPHAN LESHER**, *Media Unbound*

[Journalistic fairness] is the willingness to give the word of Judas equal weight with that of Jesus.

— **EDWARD R. MURROW**, broadcaster, original source
unknown

The truth is rarely pure, and never simple.

— **OSCAR WILDE**, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

If truth was a factor, we couldn't publish half the statements public officials make.

— **SEYMOUR HERSH**, investigative journalist and author,
quoted in *Rolling Stone*, April 18, 1985

The press just doesn't know how to handle flat-out untruths.

— **PAUL KRUGMAN**, ABC News's "This Week," October 7,
2012

To have integrity in the media business today means only to be "objective," which has become a code word for having no convictions.

— **SUSAN FALUDI**, *The Nation*, May 27, 1996

Objectivity is a word that was invented by those who refused to stand up alone. I do believe that journalism is a fighting profession. You have to fight. You fight for [a] cause, you fight against corruption, you fight against misleading information. You fight for a lot of things.

— **DAVID HALEVY**, former *Time* magazine correspondent and
author of *Inside the PLO*. Quoted in *Booknotes: America's Finest*

Authors on Reading, Writing and the Power of Ideas.

The notion that if you get two sides you're telling the complete story is preposterous. The truth is more involved. We may be using objectivity as a shield or advice that allows us not to be better reporters.

— **WILLIAM SERRIN**, NYU professor of journalism, quoted in *Slanting the Story: The Forces That Shape the News*

There is much to be said in favor of modern journalism. By giving us the opinions of the uneducated, it keeps us in touch with the ignorance of the community.

— **OSCAR WILDE**, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*

Journalism consists in saying “Lord Jones Dead” to people who never knew Lord Jones was alive.

— **GILBERT K. CHESTERTON**, English essayist, *The Wisdom of Father Brown*

That is journalism — an ability to meet the challenge of filling the space.

— **REBECCA WEST**, novelist, *New York Herald Tribune*, April 22, 1956

Much of our flawed work is never acknowledged or corrected.

— **RICHARD HARWOOD**, “How Lies See Light of Day,” *Washington Post*, July 13, 1998

Working as a journalist is exactly like being a wallflower at the orgy. I always seem to find myself at a perfectly wonderful event where everybody is having a marvelous time, laughing merrily, eating,

drinking, having sex in the back room, and I am on the side taking notes on it all.

— **NORA EPHRON**, *Wallflower at the Orgy*

The highest goal in journalism is to bring someone down... It is the way careers and reputations are made.

— **JAY ROSEN**, associate professor of journalism, New York University, quoted in *U. S. News and World Report*, October 5, 1998

Reporters are like puppets. They simply respond to the pull of the most powerful strings.

— **LYNDON B. JOHNSON**, President, quoted in *Morrow's International Dictionary of Contemporary Quotations* compiled by Jonathon Green

When the day dissolves, little, if anything, will be remembered of these things.

— **ROGER ROSENBLATT**, *Time*, December 12, 1983

Let me tell you about our profession. We are the meanest, nastiest bunch of jealous, petty people who ever lived... You think I wouldn't sell my mother for My Lai?

— **SEYMOUR HERSH**, investigative journalist and author, quoted in *Vanity Fair*, November 1997

Every journalist who is not too stupid or too full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible. He is

a kind of confidence man, preying on people's vanity, ignorance, or loneliness, gaining their trust and betraying them without remorse.

— **JANET MALCOLM**, *The Journalist and the Murderer*

You are going to make enemies all the time if you do your job.

— **GERALD POSNER**, quoted in *Raising Hell: Straight Talk with Investigative Journalists*, edited by Ron Chepesiuk, Haney Howell and Edward Lee

If you do your job right, only two people show up at your funeral.

— Common journalism saying

When I was a young reporter and a young man I wish I would have been more concerned with the human beings I was writing about than about getting their stories. I wish my ambition would have been tempered with more compassion and sensitivity. It's one of the things that made me want to get out of journalism. As a journalist you mute what you really care about, so that you can cover those stories. I had a prof in journalism school who said to me, "You'll know you're really a good reporter when you can go to an autopsy and eat a cheeseburger while watching it."

— **JOE ESZTERHAS**, screenwriter, April 1998 *Playboy* interview

People who are drawn to journalism are usually people who, because of their cynicism or emotional detachment or reserve or whatever, are incapable of becoming anything but witnesses to events.

— **NORA EPHRON**, *Wallflower at the Orgy*

In most fields, drawing informed conclusions is a sign of credibility. Only in journalism does the ideal health care reporter purport to have no opinion as to what makes a good health care system.

— **JAMES PONIEWOZIK**, “The End of Objectivity,” *Time*,
November 29, 2010,

<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2032138,00.html>

For all its faults, journalism is the one institution that preserves free inquiry and therefore freedom itself.

— **JAMES DEAKEN**, *Straight Stuff*

∞ JOURNALISM: INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING ∞

(*Definition*) An investigative reporter is one who doesn't know when to quit.

— **DOUGLAS KENNEDY**, editor, *True Magazine*

An ordinary reporter is persistent. An investigative reporter never gives up, no matter how insurmountable the obstacles, or how hopeless the prospects.

— **JAMES DYGERT**, *The Investigative Journalist: Folk Heroes of a New Era*

In a sense, all reporting is investigative, but the phrase “investigative reporting” usually describes sustained attempts to uncover illegal activities or conflicts of interest.

— **TOM GOLDSMITH**, *The News At Any Cost*

Though all reporting involves investigation, what we have come to understand as investigative journalism adds a moral dimension.

— **BILL KOVACH and TOM ROSENTIEL**, *The Elements of Journalism*

The investigative reporter serves as a kind of moral custodian of the Republic, trying to close the gap — always there and often wide — between what men say and what men do. Wrongdoing is his target.

— **THOMAS POWERS**, author and journalist

An investigative reporter has to be a detective, a lawyer, and a social reformer all wrapped up in one, and that's rare.

— **A. M. ROSENTHAL**, managing editor, *New York Times*,
quoted in New York, November 12, 1973

The new American folk hero... The glamour boy of journalism.

— What *New York* magazine called the investigative reporter in its
November 12, 1973 issue

We don't have enough of those. It's a shame we have to be nostalgic about them.

— **VICTOR NAVASKY**, editor, *The Nation*, quoted in Vanity
Fair, March 1985, twelve years later

A sustaining myth of journalism holds that every great government scandal is revealed through the work of enterprising reporters who by one means or another pierce the official veil of secrecy. The role that government institutions play in exposing official misconduct and corruption therefore tends to be seriously neglected, if not wholly ignored.

— **EDWARD J. EPSTEIN**, *Between Fact and Fiction*

Despite the more heroic claims of the news media, daily journalism is largely concerned with finding and retaining profitable sources of packaged stories.

— **EDWARD J. EPSTEIN**, *Between Fact and Fiction*

Fewer than fifteen (of the 133 Washington newspaper correspondents)

were assigned fulltime to Watergate — some for only two weeks.

— **BEN BAGDIKIAN**, media critic, arguing that the press as an institution, while taking credit for helping crack the Watergate cover-up, did not perform as admirably as it claimed, *Columbia Journalism Review*, January/February 1973

A nasty, unreported truth about journalism is this: Journalism is a business. Journalists like to pretend this is not so, but it is... Because it is a business, journalism is far less than the independent, courageous force that generations of journalists... claim it to be.

— **WILLIAM SERRIN**, editor, *The Business of Journalism*

The most essential gift for a good writer is a built-in, shockproof shit detector. This is the writer's radar and all great writers have had it.

— **ERNEST HEMINGWAY**, novelist, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Spring 1958

Any investigative journalist can be totally fucking conned so easy. We're the easiest lays in town.

— **SEYMOUR HERSH**, quoted in *Vanity Fair*, November 1997

∞ LANGUAGE ∞

The difference between the right word and the almost right word... is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.

— **MARK TWAIN**, quoted in *The Art of Authorship* by George Bainton. (This quote, incidentally, appears to have been cleaned up)

One sign of the born writer is his gift for finding or (sometimes) inventing authentically interesting language.

— **JOHN GARDNER**, *On Becoming a Novelist*

A huge vocabulary is not always an advantage. Simple language... can be more effective than complex language, which can lead to stiltedness or suggest dishonesty or faulty education.

— **JOHN GARDNER**, *The Art of Fiction*

Turgid writing causes misunderstanding. When the message is obscured by verbal smog, the reader doesn't, in fact, get the message.

— **PAULA LaROQUE**, *The Book on Writing: The Ultimate Guide to Writing Well*

The key to writing is to make reading easy for your reader. The words should disappear as the movie in their mind begins. The reader should forget they're even reading a book.

— **RUTH ANN NORDIN**, "Marketing Starts With Your Book," *Self-Published Author's Lounge*, March 28, 2012, selfpubauthors.com/2012/03/28/marketing-starts-with-your-book/

The best writing is that which doesn't call attention to itself.

— **WILLIAM APPEL and DENISE STERRS**, *The Truth About Fiction Writing*

The good writer makes his meaning as clear as possible.

— **GARY PROVOST**, *Writer's Digest*, March 1984

Edward M. Yoder, former editor of the editorial page of the *Washington Star*, once said that among writers, an addiction to big words is worse than addiction to alcohol. No cure is known to exist. Once the young writer succumbs to arcane polysyllables, he remains syntactically stewed. His rhetorical bibulousness can no longer be restrained. He cannot get enough. He begins to invent words.

— **JAMES KILPATRICK**, *The Writer's Art*

No one can write decently who is distrustful of the reader's intelligence, or whose attitude is patronizing.

— **E. B. WHITE**, quoted in *How To Enjoy Writing* by Janet and Isaac Asimov

Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print; never use a long word where a short one will do; if it is possible to cut a word out always cut it out; never use the passive where you can use the active; never use a foreign phrase, scientific word or jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.

— **GEORGE ORWELL's** rules for writing, quoted in *George Orwell: The Road to 1984* by Peter Lewis

The purpose of language is to express, not to impress.

— **PATRICIA WESTHEIMER**, quoted in *Home Office Computing*, January 1990

I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant.

— **JAMES JOYCE**, novelist, claiming “that’s the only way of insuring one’s immortality”

A first-rate writer... respects writing too much to be tricky.

— **VIRGINIA WOOLF**, criticizing Joyce’s *Ulysses*, in *A Writer’s Diary*, edited by Leonard Woolf

A work of art that one has to explain fails... its mission.

— **HENRY JAMES**, literary critic

Good writers have two things in common: they prefer being understood to being admired, and they do not write for the overcritical or too shrewd reader.

— **FRIEDRICH W. NIETZSCHE**, *Human, All Too Human*

Good writers know how to describe people, places, things and action so the reader can see them too. They create pictures with words.

— **PAULA LaROQUE**, *The Book on Writing: The Ultimate Guide to Writing Well*

The purpose of a story... is not to fulfill some crazy formalistic Aristotelian rule, but to get the fucking reader to read the fucking book.

— **ERICA JONG**, quoted in *Interviews With Contemporary*

Novelists by Diana Cooper-Clark

I prefer to underwrite. Simple, clear as a country creek.

— **TRUMAN CAPOTE**, novelist

The writer does the most, who gives his reader the most knowledge, and takes from him the least time.

— **CHARLES CALEB COLTON**, preface, *Iacon*

Use the time of a total stranger in such a way that he or she will not feel the time was wasted.

— **KURT VONNEGUT**, *Bagombo Snuff Box: Uncollected Short Fiction*

Most of the time less is more.

— **DONALD MURRAY**, *Writing for Your Readers*

The Ten Commandments contained 297 words... The Bill of Rights is stated in 438 words... Lincoln's Gettysburg Address contained 266 words. A recent federal directive to regulate the price of cabbage contains 26,911 words.

— Original source unknown

Even the second coming of Christ doesn't merit more than 600 words.

— **FRANK GARAFOLO**, original source unknown

A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.

— **WILLIAM STRUNK, JR.**, *The Elements of Style*

∞ LITERATURE ∞

Literary success of any enduring kind is made by refusing to do what publishers want, by refusing to write what the public wants, by refusing to accept any popular standards, by refusing to write anything to order.

— **LAFCADIO HEARN** (who's he?). Quoted in *Lafcadio Hearn: Life and Letters*, edited by Elizabeth Bisland.

Painstaking research proves that one of America's greatest authors may in fact have been readable.

— Headline, *National Lampoon* article, January 1984

A classic is something that everybody wants to have read and nobody wants to read.

— **MARK TWAIN**, speech, "The Disappearance of Literature," 19th Century Club, November 20, 1900. Quoted in *Mark Twain's Speeches*, edited by Albert Bigelow Paine.

Maybe the whole idea of the "classic," the book that survives over time, is obsolete; in a society where so much is disposable, why should literature be made to last?

— **JAMES ATLAS**, *Vanity Fair*, October 1985

Basically, [literature] is a means of transmitting experience, feeling, and emotion so that one man can tell others, either in the present or in the future, something of the story of how men and women have lived and felt and thought.

— **JAMES T. FARRELL**, *James T. Farrell: Literary Essays*,

1954-1977, collected and edited by Jack Alan Robins

The business of literature is to reveal life.

— **MAXWELL E. PERKINS**, letter to Nancy Hale, October 21, 1942, quoted in *Editor to Author: The Letters of Maxwell E. Perkins*, selected and edited by John Hall Wheelock

Literature stirs the mind. It makes you think about a million things, but it does not lead you. So the basic function of literature, as far as I can see, is to entertain the spirit... It's basically an entertainment and it has only qualities of entertainment — which means, if you are not entertained while you read a book there is no other reward for you.

— **ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER**, short story writer/ novelist, quoted in *The Contemporary Writers: Interviews with Sixteen Novelists and Poets*

Fiction, even at its best, is remarkably useless in the world of events... The men who tinker with rubber, metal, neutrons and drugs — not those who tinker with fiction — hold the key to events.

— **WRIGHT MORRIS**, *About Fiction*

Writers were not born to change the world. We cannot [even] make it worse.

— **ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER**, quoted in *Interviews with Contemporary Novelists* by Diana Cooper-Clark

We have the power to bore people long after we are dead.

— **SINCLAIR LEWIS**, novelist, quoted in *The Complete Guide to*

Writing Fiction by Barnaby Conrad

It seems that the postwar crop of writers has been preoccupied with personal problems. A contemplation of the navel, as it were.

— **VAN ALLEN BRADLEY**, literary critic, quoted in
Conversations by Roy Newquist

There are a lot of good writers, but they're not changing anything in American life. They are writing for each other.

— **NORMAN MAILER**, quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*, May
27, 1998

There has been a swing away from the great literature of the twenties and thirties where writers were driven by social injustices of their times.

— **LEON URIS**, novelist, quoted in *Quest for Truth* compiled by
Martha Boaz

If this thirty-year period (1945-1975) has in fact produced its identifying masterpieces, we do not appear to know what they are or where exactly to find them.

— **WARNER BERTHOFF**, *A Literature Without Qualities:
American Writing Since 1945*

Perhaps the times are no longer propitious to the production of masterpieces which both embrace and enhance life.

— **ANTHONY BURGESS**, *The Novel Now*

This country is crawling with young angry men — in sociology, in politics, in biology. But I am looking for the angry men in literature. I

am waiting for a strong spiritual man who would bang his fist on the table and say, “Enough of this nonsense!”

— **ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER**, short story writer/ novelist,
quoted in *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1970

Let us reflect whether there be any living writer whose silence we would consider a literary disaster.

— **CYRIL CONNOLLY**, British critic, quoted in *Time*, July 26, 1982

Very few disastrous silences loom.

— **LANCE MORROW**, “We Need More Writers We’d Miss,”
Time, July 26, 1982. Morrow named some of the most prominent American writers: Philip Roth and the since deceased John Gardner, Truman Capote, Joseph Heller, John Irving, Norman Mailer, William Styron, Walker Percy, John Updike, and Gore Vidal, and suggested it would not be a cultural disaster if any of them stopped writing.

Perhaps great writers arrive only at certain stages of a civilization. Great writing may be conjured by great injustice.

— **LANCE MORROW**, “We Need More Writers We’d Miss,”
Time, July 26, 1982

To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme.

— **HERMAN MELVILLE**, *Moby Dick*

No great work has ever been produced except after a long interval of still

and musing meditation.

— **WALTER BAGEHOT**, English economist and journalist

To say that a text or a body of work is *literature* means that it is regarded, studied, read and analyzed in a literary way.

— **MARJORIE GARBER**, *The Use and Abuse of Literature*

One cannot help feeling that its guardians sometimes miss the point of literature, which is not to cut gems of flashing and exquisite rarity but to communicate, to convey a meaning, an art, a story, a fantasy, even a mystery, to someone.

— **BARBARA TUCHMAN**, historian. Lecture, “The Book,” at the Library of Congress, October 17, 1979.

He knew everything about literature except how to enjoy it.

— **JOSEPH HELLER**, *Catch-22*

Need we totally scorn mere escapism? . . . The trivial novel may be taking someone’s mind off illness, injury, the loneliness of old age or the turmoil of adolescence. There are times when human beings need to put their feet up and relax.

— **MARJORIE BOULTON**, *The Anatomy of the Novel*

I am on the verge of rage when I listen to certain kinds of academics who believe that literature is really the province of a select few. It’s not. Storytelling is as innate to human experience as music, and some of us who may feel a fundamental responsibility to recognize that and to seek as wide an audience as is possible.

— **SCOTT TUROW**, novelist, quoted in *Conversations with American Novelists*, edited by Kay Bonetti, Greg Michalson, Speer Morgan, Jo Sapp, and Sam Stowers

Escapist literature at least does much to keep us out of mischief.

— **MARJORIE BOULTON**, *The Anatomy of the Novel*

The only end of writing is to enable readers to better enjoy life or better... endure it.

— **MARK JACOBSON**, novelist and journalist. essay, “For the Money,” in *Why I Write: Thoughts on the Craft of Fiction*, edited by Will Blythe

Whoever said that books should have redeeming social value? . . . The first amendment says nothing of the kind.

— **MICHAEL KORDA**, editor, quoted in *Inside Books*, February 1989

∞ NOVELS ∞

Every journalist has a novel in him, which is an excellent place for it.

— **RUSSELL LYNES**, former managing editor, Harper's magazine, quoted in *Quotations of Wit and Wisdom* by John W. Gardner and Francesca Gardner Reese

Newspaper work will not harm a young writer and could help him if he gets out of it in time.

— **ERNEST HEMINGWAY**, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Spring 1958

Journalism allows its readers to witness history; fiction gives its readers the opportunity to live it.

— **JOHN HERSEY**, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1949

More often than not, fiction, with its beautiful descriptions and its artful lies, reveals far more than fact ever will.

— **WILL BLYTHE**, editor, *Why I Write: Thoughts on the Craft of Fiction*

Fiction reveals truths that reality obscures.

— **JESSAMYN WEST**, quoted in *Reader's Digest*, April 1973

If you would understand your age, read the works of fiction produced by it. People in disguise speak freely.

— **ARTHUR HELPS**, British author, original source unknown

The historian's view is like that of a jet pilot's who sees the hundreds of

cars on a freeway as one great fused mechanical entity. But the novelist, as he writes about our time, will continue to zoom in and focus upon the individual, for he knows — and sometimes the historian doesn't — that in the entire universe there is only one thing that possesses an ultimate importance, and that is the individual.

— **FREDERICK SHROYER**, quoted in *The Quest For Truth* by Martha Boaz

The object of the novel... is to enlarge experience, not to convey facts.

— **DAVID GARNETT**, British writer, quoted in *Contemporary Novelists* by James Vinson

A novel is an impression, not an argument.

— **THOMAS HARDY**, preface, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

The purpose of fiction is still, as it was to Joseph Conrad, to make the reader see.

— **PETER DE VRIES**, *Without a Stitch in Time*

Novels seem more expendable these days than ever, but *novelist* is still any writer's notion of original talent.

— **ALFRED KAZIN**, *Bright Book of Life*

(*Definition*) The literary form of greatest prestige.

— **EDWIN BERRY BURGUM**, *The Novel and the World's Dilemma*

Every novelist has something in common with a spy: he watches, he overhears, he seeks motives and analyzes characters, and in his attempt

to serve literature he is unscrupulous.

— **GRAHAM GREENE**, *Ways of Escape*

There is only one trait that marks the writer. He is always watching. It's a kind of trick of the mind and he is born with it.

— **MORLEY CALLAGHAN**, Canadian writer

I think we should put away the stethoscope and leave the patient alone.

— **PETER DE VRIES**, novelist, dismissing the ridiculous debate over whether the novel is dying. Quoted in *Conversations* by Roy Newquist

The fact that Judith Krantz can make three million dollars is proof that the novel is alive and well.

— **ERICA JONG**, quoted in *Interviews with Contemporary Novelists* by Diana Cooper-Clark

The good thing about writing fiction is that you can get back at people. I've gotten back at lawyers, judges, law professors, and politicians. I just line 'em up and shoot 'em.

— **JOHN GRISHAM**, quoted in *Walking on Alligators* by Susan Shaughnessy

Every novel should have a beginning, a muddle and an end.

— **PETER DE VRIES**, author of 23 novels

Today's impatient readers give a novelist fewer than seven minutes... Therefore, whenever an author told me that his novel really got going on page ten or twenty or thirty, I had to pass on the news that his book in all

likelihood was doomed unless he could revise it so that the first three pages aroused the reader's interest enough to quarantine him from distraction for the several hours the book demanded of him.

— **SOL STEIN**, *Stein on Writing*

If you can't catch the reader's attention at the start and hold it, there's no point in going on.

— **MARIANNE MOORE**, twentieth century poet

I know the final scene before I start... John Irving writes the final scene first, which is pretty tough. But if you know that last scene, it's hard to get lost. I don't work backwards, but I always know where I'm going.

— **JOHN GRISHAM**, quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*,

November 3, 2011 www.blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2011/11/03/will-there-ever-be-another-john-grisham-john-grisham-has-some-thoughts/

For me, the criterion (for a really good novel) is that the author has created a total world in which his people move credibly. The books that do that, I prize very much.

— **JAMES MICHENER**, quoted in *Conversations with Writers II*, edited by Matthew J. Bruccoli

A well-composed book is a magic carpet on which we are wafted to a world that we cannot enter in any other way.

— **CAROLINE GORDON**, *How to Read a Novel*

Good writers are in the business of leaving signposts saying, Tour my

world, see and feel it through my eyes; I am your guide.

— **LARRY L. KING**, *None but a Blockhead: On Being a Writer*

As a reader, I want a book to kidnap me into its world. Its world must make my so-called real world seem flimsy. Its world must lure me to return. When I close the book, I should feel bereft.

— **ERICA JONG**, “Doing It For Love,” *The Writer*, July 1997

For me, a page of good prose is where one hears the rain. A page of good prose is when one hears the noise of battle. A page of good prose has the power to give grief a universality that lends it a youthful beauty.

— **JOHN CHEEVER**, novelist, in his speech accepting the National Medal for Literature, April 27, 1982

Good writing is supposed to evoke sensation in the reader, not the fact that it’s raining, but the feeling of being rained upon.

— Attributed to **E. L. DOCTOROW**, novelist

I think of my novels as being something like fairground rides; my job is to strap the reader into their car at the start of chapter one, then trundle and whizz them through scenes and surprises, on a carefully planned route, and at a finely engineered pace.

— Attributed to **SARAH WATERS**, English novelist

A story must be exceptional enough to justify its telling. We story-tellers are all Ancient Mariners, and none of us is justified in stopping Wedding Guests (in other words, the hurrying public), unless he has something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experiences of every average

man and woman.

— **THOMAS HARDY**, *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy*

For a novel [to be a bestseller] it must be a page-turner. A book you can't put down, that you want to read in a gulp. One that keeps you up all night.

— **JAMES W. HALL**, *Hit Lit: Cracking the Code of the Twentieth Century's Biggest Bestsellers*

To me, it seems disrespectful... that a “wannabe” assumes it's all so easy s/he can put out a “published novel” without bothering to read, study or do the research. Learning to construct a narrative and create character, learning to balance pace, description, exposition and dialogue takes a long time.

— **SUE GRAFTON**, quoted in “Louisville Author Spotlight Welcomes Sue Grafton” by Leslea Tash, August 7, 2012,
www.louisvilleky.com/2012/08/louisville-author-spotlight-welcomes-sue-grafton/

No novel is anything... unless the reader can sympathize with the characters whose names he finds upon the pages.

— **ANTHONY TROLLOPE**, *Autobiography*

When writing a novel a writer should create living people, not characters. A character is a caricature.

— **ERNEST HEMINGWAY**, *Death in the Afternoon*

Anyone can think up a story. But trying to breathe life into characters,

allow them space, make them people whom I care about is hard.

— **PHYLLIS REYNOLDS NAYLOR**, *The Craft of Writing the Novel*

A stick man.

— What novelists call a fictional character that is not fully flushed

Writers of literary and much mainstream fiction usually begin by imagining a character.

— **SOL STEIN**, *Stein on Writing*

Give the reader at least one character he or she can root for.

— **KURT VONNEGUT**, *Bagombo Snuff Box: Uncollected Short Fiction*

The trouble with some contemporary novels is that they are full of people not worth knowing. The characters slide in and out of the mind with hardly a ripple.

— **NORMAN COUSINS**, *Human Options*

Character is the “heart of fiction.” Before you can become interested in the development and outcome of the conflict in the story, you must care about the main character, the protagonist (who struggles for something).

— **DAVID MADDEN**, *The Fiction Tutor*

You must write about people who touch the reader; you must make the reader *care*.

— **JOHN IRVING**, quoted in *Conversations on Writing Fiction* by Alexander Neubauer

Do as the painter or sculptor does; take your models from life.

— **MAREN ELWOOD**, *Characters Make Your Story*

It does not matter if your reader loves or hates your characters. What matters is that the reader feels something.

— **JANET EVANOVICH and INA YALOF**, *How I Write*

Characters that seem to live are the most important single element in the novel. No one remembers novels for their style, or for the skills with which their plots were constructed.

— **NANCY HALE**, *The Realities of Fiction*

Good characters are not real people; they are better than real people. Good characters are not only exaggerated, but more goal-oriented, more consistent (with tricks used to make them appear more complex than they really are), engaged in more dramatic circumstances than most of us ever encounter in day-to-day living, and more committed to their quest.

— **JACK M. BICKHAM**, *Writing and Selling Your Novel*

Live with them (your characters). Think about them. Visualize them in different environments and in different situations. See how they would react under this stimulus or that and imagine those scenes as if they were scenes in all their details. After you have done this for a few weeks or months, you will have no difficulty in making your characters seem real to your readers, because they will seem real to you.

— **MAREN ELWOOD**, *Characters Make Your Story*

Creating believable backgrounds for characters gave me problems until

one day, while filling out a job application form, it hit me. I would make my characters apply to be in my stories. I'd learn about my characters the same way companies learn about new employees: an application form.

— **TOM CLANCY**, “How to Write a Bestselling Novel,” *Writer's Digest*, October 1987

You can never know enough about your characters.

— **W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM**, *The Art of Fiction*

[When I want to] introduce a character — I sort of audition my characters — let's see if they work or not.

— **ELMORE LEONARD**, writing in *The Complete Guide to Writing Fiction* by Barnaby Conrad

Making the reader like or dislike the character is generally half the battle. Sometimes, as with Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, we neither like nor dislike the protagonist but we understand him and are interested in his fate.

— **BARNABY CONRAD**, *The Complete Guide to Writing Fiction*

Visualize your characters. Who are they? What do they look like? What are their hopes, their fears, their desires? And how will getting what they want somehow put them in conflict with others?

— **ROBERT MASSELO**, *Robert's Rules of Writing*

The most frequently recurring characteristic [of characters in bestsellers] is a high level of emotional intensity that results in gutsy and surprising

deeds. These actions may not always take the form of swashbuckling heroics, but rest assured, not one of these heroes or heroines sits idly on the sidelines pondering or strikes endless matches to watch them to burn while stewing about the great issues of the universe... Our heroes and heroines act. They act decisively.

— **JAMES W. HALL**, *Hit Lit: Cracking the Code of the Twentieth Century's Biggest Bestsellers*

Be a sadist. No matter how sweet and innocent your leading characters, make awful things happen to them — in order that the reader may see what they are made of.

— **KURT VONNEGUT**, *Bagombo Snuff Box: Uncollected Short Fiction*

I leave out the parts that people skip.

— **ELMORE LEONARD**, explaining the popularity of his novels, *Elmore Leonard's 10 Rules of Writing*

It is easy enough, once the commercial success of a book is an established fact, to work out a convincing reason for the public's enthusiasm. But, before the fact has happened, the business is mysterious, chancy, [and] unpredictable.

— **ELIZABETH HARDWICK**, "The Decline of Book Reviewing," in *Writing in America*, edited by John Fischer and Robert B. Silvers

I find that nonfiction writers are the likeliest to turn out interesting novels.

— **MICHAEL KORDA**, editor-in-chief, Simon & Schuster

Write a novel if you must, but think of money as an unlikely accident.
Get your reward out of writing it, and try to be content with that.

— **PEARL BUCK**, *Writer's Roundtable*

I'm no Joan Didion. There are no intelligent, unhappy people in my books. I want to be known as a writer of good entertaining narrative. I'm not trying to be taken seriously by the East Coast literary establishment. But I'm taken very seriously by the bankers.

— **JUDITH KRANTZ**, novelist, quoted in *The Blockbuster Complex* by Thomas Whiteside

∞ ORIGINALITY ∞

There is nothing new under the Sun.

— *The Bible* (Ecclesiastes 1:9)

The most original authors... are not so because they advance what is new, but because they put what they have to say as if it had never been said before.

— **JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE**, *Spruche in Prosa*

The original writer is not one who imitates nobody, but one whom nobody can imitate.

— **FRANCOIS RENE DE CHATEAUBRIAND**, *Le Genie du Christianisme*

The man is most original who can adapt from the greatest number of sources.

— **THOMAS CARLYLE**, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*

We are as much informed of a writer's genius by what he selects as by what he originates.

— **RALPH WALDO EMERSON**, essayist, poet, and philosopher.

Quoted in *Barnes & Noble Book of Quotations*, edited by Robert I.

Fitzhenry

A new idea is delicate. It can be killed by a sneer or a yawn; it can be stabbed to death by a quip or worried to death by a frown on the right

man's brow.

— **CHARLES BROWER**, *Advertising Age*, August 10, 1959

Novelty comes chiefly from ingenious genre-crossing or elevation of familiar materials.

— **JOHN GARDNER**, *The Art of Fiction*

A great book is often ahead of its time, and the trick is how to keep it afloat until the times catch up with it.

— **ROBERT GIROUX**, chairman, Farrar, Straus & Giroux,
quoted in *Wilson Library Bulletin*, March 1982

A good artist predicts as well as reflects, and all I ask is that they say, “We know now what they couldn’t see then. He was six months ahead of his time.”

— **PETER DE VRIES**, novelist, quoted in *Conversations* by Roy
Newquist

All profoundly original work looks ugly at first.

— **CLEMENT GREENBERG**, American art critic

Every compulsion is put on writers to become safe, polite, obedient and sterile.

— **SINCLAIR LEWIS**, in a letter declining the Pulitzer Prize for
his novel *Arrowsmith*, May 6, 1926

How daring and how dangerous the innovators often seem in their own day! . . . Wait fifty years, and they do not seem so daring or dangerous, so godlike or so devilish.

— **ASHLEY THORNDIKE**, *The Outlook for Literature*

The world in general doesn't know what to make of originality; it is startled out of its comfortable habits of thought, and its first reaction is one of anger.

— **W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM**, *Great Novelists and Their Novels*

One age's oddities and curiosities are often another's masterpieces. It may be that it requires a long absorptive time for a unique style to be understood and then admired, or an original thought to be comprehended and then appreciated. The resistance to such phenomena is great. Most people prefer the easy and familiar... Only the future reveres the original and daring style.

— **DORIS GRUMBACH**, introduction, *Writer's Choice*, edited by Linda Sternberg Katz and Bill Katz

∞ OVERCOMING WRITER'S BLOCK ∞

Writer's block is going to happen to you. You will read what little you've written lately and see with absolute clarity that it is total dog shit.

— **NORMAN MAILER**, *The Spooky Art*

Writer's block can last anywhere from a few minutes to several decades. Usually, though, it only lasts a few hours or days. It is almost never serious. In fact, for some writers it's a natural and necessary part of the writing process.

— **MARVIN WEISBORD**, editor, *A Treasury of Tips for Writers*

[When it happens] Do something else. Forcing yourself to write when you don't feel any inspiration can lead to disastrous results.

— **JEANIE BARCUS**, "Tricks for Beating Writers Block," *Where Writers Win* blog, October 3, 2012,

www.writerswin.com/2012/10/03/tricks-for-beating-writers-block/?utm_source=Where+Writers+Win+Blog+Subscribers&utm_campaign=10_7_12_Update&utm_medium=email

[When it happens] Go for a walk. Eliminate distractions... Do something to get your blood flowing... Change your environment. Read a book.

— **JEFF GOINS**, *How to Overcome Writer's Block*,

www.goinswriter.com/how-to-overcome-writers-block/, undated

Write, do not talk, to your nearest confidante, spouse, bartender, analyst, whomever... Writing's block can only be overcome by writing.

— **ALFRED BALK**, American journalist and editor, in *A Treasury of Tips for Writers*, edited by Marvin Weisbord

If you can't start your article in the beginning, start beginning in the middle. If you're stuck there, try doing some other midsection or maybe the ending... The important thing is to get something down on paper no matter how you do it.

— **JOSE SCHORR**, in *A Treasury of Tips for Writers*, edited by Marvin Weisbord

Do not be married to results... Most people have to write pages of utter crap before they stumble upon that moment, phrase, idea or character that really makes things click. No one else has to see that pile of crumpled papers in the trash. It's your little secret.

— **CHRIS ROBLEY**, "Writer's Block: The 12-Step Cure," November 30, 2011, www.thecreativepenn.com/2011/11/30/cure-writers-block/

When you approach a roadblock, don't be afraid to take a detour. If you are stuck writing your lead sentences, try drafting a passage that might end up in the middle.

— **ROY PETER CLARK**, *Help For Writers: 210 Solutions to the Problems Every Writer Faces*

The trick is to fool yourself into thinking that your story is something else: a memo, a journal entry, a letter, a note to a friend, a grocery list, anything that blows up the logjam.

— **ROY PETER CLARK**, *Help For Writers: 210 Solutions to the*

Problems Every Writer Faces

The words will come eventually. You just never know when.

— **DINTY W. MOORE**, *The Mindful Writer*

Writer's block is a luxury most people with deadlines don't have.

— **DIANE ACKERMAN**, novelist, original source unknown

When I hear about writer's block, this one and that one! Fuck off! Stop writing, for Christ's sake. You're not meant to be doing this. Plenty more where you came from.

— **GORE VIDAL**, novelist, original source unknown

∞ PERSEVERANCE ∞

With ordinary talent and extraordinary perseverance, all things are attainable.

— **THOMAS BUXTON**, British philanthropist, quoted in *The World's Best Thoughts on Success & Failure* compiled by Eugene Raudsepp

Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.

— **THOMAS EDISON**, inventor, quoted in *The World's Best Thoughts on Success & Failure* compiled by Eugene Raudsepp

The trick is not to give up, ever. Suppose the late Erskine Caldwell had been able to stand only six years of soul-battering rejection. Instead of going on to write some forty books, he would have been a failure, like Victor Borge's uncle who unsuccessfully tried to market a variety of soft drinks called from 1-Up to 6-Up — and then quit.

— **BARNABY CONRAD**, *The Complete Guide to Writing Fiction*

With but very few exceptions, every writer whose published work you have read or relished managed to capture your attention only after taking a fearsome beating of the ego.

— **GEORGE V. HIGGINS**, *On Writing: Advice for Those Who Write to Publish (Or Would Like To)*

Some of the most natural writers... are among the disappeared. As far as I can tell, the decisive factor is what I call durability; that is, the ability

to deal effectively with uncertainty, rejection, and disappointment from within, as well as without.

— **TED SOLATOROFF**, “Writing in the Cold: The First Ten Years,” *New American Review*, date unknown

In writing, as in so many pursuits, it’s not the most gifted but the most determined who succeed. John Berryman thought talent was no more than twenty percent of a poet’s makeup. This is probably true for any type of writer. Those we hear about are more blessed with pluck and persistence than ability and skill.

— **NORMAN MAILER**, *The Spooky Art*

The reality is that J. A. Konrath and J. K. Rowling and other big names in the “book biz” may spend about 20 years in the trenches. They worked as hard as any of us to make it, and still work hard to keep it up... You need to live a long time to make this work, because it takes a decade or two to become an overnight sensation.

— **CAROL A. BUCHMAN**, “The Entrepreneurial Author,”
August 24, 2011, www.mtbusiness.com

Nothing in the world can take the place of perseverance. Talent will not; nothing in this world is more common than men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Perseverance and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan “Press on” has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.

— **CALVIN COOLIDGE**, President, in the program for his memorial service, 1933

See also “[Success and Failure.](#)”

∞ PLAGIARISM ∞

OSCAR WILDE: Oh, I wish I'd said that.

JAMES WHISTLER: You will, Oscar, you will.

— Quoted in *Oscar Wilde* by L. C. Ingleby

Your manuscript is both good and original; but the part that is good is not original, and the part that is original is not good.

— **SAMUEL JOHNSON**, English lexicographer

If you steal from one author it's plagiarism; if you steal from many it's research.

— **WILSON MIZNER**, quoted in *The Legendary Mizners* by Alva Johnston

If we steal thoughts from the moderns, it will be cried down as plagiarism; if from the ancients, it will be cried up as erudition.

— **CHARLES CALEB COLTON**, *Lacon*

I think it may be said that the more worthless the manuscript, the greater the fear of plagiarism.

— **SIR STANLEY UNWIN**, *The Truth About Publishing*

All writers are thieves; theft is a necessary tool of the trade.

— **NINA BAWDEN**, *Mothers: Reflections by Daughters*

It doesn't matter who says it first, it's who gets credit for it last that counts.

— **OSCAR LEVANT**, *actor*

[Plagiarism is) the only “ism” Hollywood believes in.

— **DOROTHY PARKER**, *humorist*

This is something you never, never do. Every line of work needs clear rules. If you’re a soldier, you don’t desert. If you’re a writer, you don’t steal anyone’s prose. It should be the one [cause for] automatic firing.

— **JAMES FALLOWS**, Washington editor of *The Atlantic*

Monthly, quoted in *Columbia Journalism Review*, July/August 1995

∞ POETRY ∞

It's a sad fact about our culture that a poet can earn much more money writing or talking about his art than he can by practicing it.

— **W. H. AUDEN**, *The Dyer's Hand*

The only serious poet in this century said to have been able to live off his poetry was Robert Frost.

— **JOSEPH EPSTEIN**, *Plausible Prejudices*

Among America's 240 million people there aren't 1,000 who want a book of poetry badly enough to pay the price of a small pizza for it.

— **BEVERLY JARRETT**, associate director, Louisiana State University Press, quoted in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 26, 1985

Can you imagine thousands of American men and women crowding into Yankee Stadium to hear Robert Lowell or James Dickey read his poems? Yet we are told that such things have actually happened in Soviet Russia.

— **JAY B. HUBBELL**, *Who Are the Major American Writers?*

Poetry lifts the veil from behind the hidden beauty of the world.

— **PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY**, *A Defence of Poetry*

Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood.

— **T. S. ELIOT**, *Dante*

In America... the only poets with full-time salaries earn them at

greeting-card companies.

— **BILL THOMAS**, *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 1991

Poet: A person born with the instinct to poverty.

— **ELBERT HUBBARD**, *The Roycroft Dictionary and Book of Epigrams*

The purpose of poetry is to contribute to man's happiness.

— **WALLACE STEVENS**, quoted in *Can Poetry Matter?* by Dana Gioia

I've written some poetry I don't understand myself.

— **CARL SANDBURG**, poet

There's no money in poetry, but there's no poetry in money either.

— **ROBERT GRAVES**, poet/novelist, speech, London School of Economics, December 6, 1963

A good poem is never easy. It must be pulled out of us, like a splinter.

— **JONAH LEHRER**, *Imagine: How Creativity Works*

If Galileo had said in verse that the world moved, the Inquisition would have left him alone.

— **THOMAS HARDY**, quoted in *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy* by F. E. Hardy

A poem is no place for an idea.

— **EDGAR W. HOWE**, *Country Town Sayings*

∞ POSTERITY ∞

Posterity — what you write for after being turned down by publishers.

— **GEORGE ADE**, *Forty Modern Fables*

If you would not be forgotten, as soon as you are dead and rotten, either write things worth reading, or do things worth the writing.

— **BENJAMIN FRANKLIN**, *Poor Richard's Almanac*

To be remembered after we are dead, is but poor recompense for being treated with contempt while we are living.

— **WILLIAM HAZLITT**, *Characteristics*

There is something touching in the firm trust every author of a flop puts in posterity.

— **KURT TUCHOLSKY**, *Gesammelte Werke*

Whenever an artist thinks that the community does not sufficiently appreciate him, he takes an appeal to posterity. I wonder where his notion comes from, that posterity is equipped with superior judgment and wisdom.

— **HEYWOOD BROUN**, *Sitting on the World*

Posterity is as likely to be as wrong as anyone else.

— **HEYWOOD BROUN**, *Sitting on the World*

What every author hopes to receive from posterity — a hope usually disappointed — is justice.

— **W. H. AUDEN**, *Poe's Selected Prose and Poetry*

Writers want justice. They want some insurance that their drive, their will, their hope and delusions, their madness and profligacy, and their fierce self-belief will produce work of lasting value.

— **BETSY LERNER**, *The Forest for the Trees: An Editor's Advice to Writers*

Why should people be less stupid tomorrow than they are today?

— **JULES RENARD**, *Journal*

How much of the work of the 1600s is still around except Shakespeare's?

— **SAMUEL Z. ARKOFF**, producer of *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* and other so-called "B" pictures, quoted in *People*, October 15, 1979

Humans are generally reluctant to paw through last week's garbage on the off chance of finding the lost penny or two.

— **BRYAN F. GRIFFIN**, *Harper's*, September 1981

Dead manuscripts tell no tales.

— **AMBROSE BIERCE**, 1909 essay, "Some Disadvantages of Genius"

Immortality depends on promotion, not on literary genius.

— **DEAN POWELL**, critic, quoted in *Who Are the Major American Writers?* by Jay Hubbell

Books are a form of immortality. The words of men whose bodies are dust still live in their books... All the great lives that have lived have

been told about in books.

— **WILFRED A. PETERSON**, *The Art of Living Day by Day*

They are not dead, those people. The writers of books do not truly die; their characters, even the ones who throw themselves in front of trains or are killed in battle, come back to life over and over again.

— **ANNA QUINDLEN**, *How Reading Changed My Life*

Don't expect to be treated justly by the world. Don't even expect to be treated mercifully.

— **JOYCE CAROL OATES**, *The Faith of A Writer*

He [the writer] knows he has a short span of life, that the day will come when he must pass through the walls of oblivion, and he wants to leave a scratch on the wall — Kilroy was here — that somebody a hundred, or a thousand years later will see.

— **WILLIAM FAULKNER**, quoted in *Writers at Work*, First Series

Somebody else made money off (Vincent) van Gogh's genius and sweat. So, not only was he a genius; he was one of the greatest losers of all time.

— **WILLIAM A. GORDON**, post on LinkedIn, November 26, 2012

If what (a writer) has written is known only to a few other practitioners, or to enthusiasts, then the artist is not only not famous, he is irrelevant to his time, the only time that he has.

— **GORE VIDAL**, *Screening History*

∞ PUBLISHERS & PUBLISHING ∞

The publishing industry functions as gatekeepers of ideas insofar as they make decisions about what to “let in” and what to “keep out.”

— **LEWIS COSER, CHARLES KADUSHIN and WALTER POWELL**, *Books: The Culture and Commerce of Publishing*. (The authors note that “book reviewers, booksellers and literary agents can also be seen as gatekeepers.”)

In only rare cases do we know “for sure” what we have; almost all books perform above or below our expectations once they are published.

— **JAMES WADE and RICHARD MAREK**, “Editing Nonfiction,” *Editors on Editing*, edited by Gerald Gross

Driven by dollar signs, many major publishers now reject most manuscripts that don’t instantly emit the sweet smell of success.

— **MARK SOMMER**, “Too Many Books, Too Few Serious Readers,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 21, 1994

The largest floating crap game in the world.

— Common publishing expression

Publishing has changed profoundly over the past 30 years. It has gone from being entrepreneurial, impresarial and academic to being run like a media business.

— **MORGAN ENTREKIN**, Grove/Atlantic publisher, quoted in *Time*, April 6, 1998

The notion that publishing was once a gentleman's game is as much a fiction as anything [Edith Wharton or Sinclair Lewis] ever wrote; publishing has always been about profits, literature second; the main difference now being that it gives even less attention to the latter than it did before.

— **JONATHAN YARDLEY**, *Washington Post*, June 30, 1997

Publishers aren't really in the business of publishing books, but selling books. And it's a really important distinction that most people do not realize.

— **MARK COKER**, founder, SmashWords, quoted in a November 10, 2011, interview in *Live Journal and NaNoWriMo* www.lj-nanowrimo.livejournal.com/182160.html

Publishers have drastically changed the nature of what they published. The smaller books — serious fiction, art history, criticism — have all but disappeared from the lists of major houses.

— **ANDRE SCHIFFRIN**, “The Corporatization of Publishing,” *The Nation*, June 3, 1996

Authors whose sales are slipping are likely to be let out to pasture.

— **DONALD MAASS**, *The Literary Novelist*

I'm not saying all publishers have to be literary, but some interest in books would help.

— **A. N. WILSON**, quoted in England's *Bookseller*, July 5, 1996

So long as publishing is an industry among industries, the prestige of

whose executives depends on profits, it will wish to publish literature, especially very original literature, only as an expensive, if beloved hobby.

— **ANNIE DILLARD**, *Living by Fiction*

Every time we have to publish a public affairs book, we cringe. People forget about the event it deals with. The attention span of the American public is fleeting.

— **ALBERTO VITALE**, chairman and CEO of Random House, quoted in *The New Yorker*, October 6, 1997

There is a myth... about book publishing that it is a noble profession, an honorable and distinguished thing. The fact is, it's part of the entertainment business.

— **STEVEN SCHRAGIS**, publisher, Carol Books, quoted in *New York*, January 6, 1992

I'm in the entertainment business, no doubt about it... The public has a voice, and its voice is heard by this industry. We may not like that voice; we might prefer that the public had different tastes. But my job is to responsibly entertain the public.

— **PHYLLIS GRANN**, chairman, Putnam Berkeley Group, quoted in *Harper's*, August 1985

We sell books, other people sell shoes. What's the difference? Publishing isn't the highest art.

— **MICHAEL KORDA**, editor-in-chief, Simon & Schuster, quoted in the *New York Times Book Review*, December 9, 1979

I believe that we must realistically and frankly accept the book as a commodity, a product, an article of commerce... [A publisher's] products are products, like a piece of soap or a loaf of bread. As a matter of fact, we happen to offer food for the mind just as the grocer offers food for the body.

— **LEON SHIMKIN**, retired publisher, Simon & Schuster, quoted in *Conversations* by Roy Newquist

This may be a painful pill for would-be Faulkners and Austens to follow, and my last desire is to denigrate the miraculous processes by which raw inspiration is transmuted into literature. But I do have to declare in all candor that no one interested in being published in our time can afford to be so naive as to believe a book will make it merely because it's good.

— **RICHARD CURTIS**, *How to Be Your Own Literary Agent*

Gone are the days when most publishers can justify publication of a book solely on the grounds that it “deserves to be published.”

— **SUSAN RABINER and ALFRED FORTUNATO**, *Thinking Like Your Editor*

Trade publishers have, with few exceptions, summarily discarded serious authors with modest market potential. The books that remain... must run an increasingly punishing financial gauntlet.

— **PHIL POCHODA**, “Universities Press On,” *The Nation*, December 23, 1997

A large commercial house has to plan on selling at least 15,000 copies of a book now to justify publishing it.

— **MALCOLM JONES JR. and RAY SAWHILL**, “A Feast of Literary Delights,” *Newsweek*, December 29, 1997-January 5, 1998

In some companies editors have been told not to sign up anything that can't be counted on to hit at least 50,000 or some other arbitrary figure. Another command from on high is “buy only bestsellers.”

— **PAUL NATHAN**, “The Golden Age of Opportunity,” *Small Press*, September/October 1997

I think what's going to happen is what happened in football — the smart agents are going to extract so much from the publishers that there won't be much left on the table (for other authors).

— **MICHAEL THOMAS**, novelist, quoted in Cleveland's *Plain Dealer*, September 23, 1985

It used to be that publishers would build writers book by book, slowly increasing sales. Now they want those authors to explode.

— **MORGAN ENTREKIN**, Grove/Atlantic publisher, quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 1997

Publishing is now saying that it's no longer going to subsidize a writer's development through a couple of books until the breakout one. It immediately wants a book that's commercial, that lunges forward.

— **PETER J. SMITH**, novelist, quoted in *Los Angeles* magazine, August 1997

In the past several years, I've watched friends and colleagues suddenly find themselves without publishers after having brought out many

books. Writers now use words like “track” and “mid-list” and “brand” and “platform” . . . Authors who stumble can find themselves in quickly dire straits.

— **DANI SHAPIRO**, *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, February 7, 2010

It’s like show biz — you’re only as good as your last book. The industry is becoming more like Hollywood, with all the pressure and focus on delivering blockbusters.

— **FREDERICK R. LYNCH**, author, quoted in *Investor’s Business Daily*, May 29, 1998

I think that’s the single most depressing aspect of the business these days — that writers are thrown aside far too soon, far too readily, far too callously and unwisely.

— **DOMINICK ABEL**, literary agent, quoted in *Speaking of Murder: Interviews with Masters of Mystery and Suspense*, edited by Ed Gorman and Martin H. Greenberg

The time we allow new authors to gain a following has shrunk in half from perhaps four years to two.

— **BOB McCOY**, executive editor, Crown Publishers, quoted in *Foreword*, December 2000

It’s very common for novelists to change their names and keep writing under different names until they have a bestseller. Because they are tracked by names in the computers of the bookstores... . If you have a book that didn’t move very well, your agent will say you have to change

your name so that Crown Books or whatever chain can't tell you are the same person who only sold fifty thousand copies last time. Because they'd rather take a risk on a new writer than on one who has proven to be mid-level last time.

— **CARLTON EASTLAKE**, screenwriter, quoted in *The Screenwriting Life* by Rich Whiteside

New York publishing is self-destructing. They've forgotten what books are for. The only hope lies with the small presses that still care about ideas and authors, the craft of writing and the quality of books as cherished objects.

— An unidentified highly respected New York editor, quoted by Mark Sommer, "Too Many Books, Too Few Serious Readers," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 21, 1994

I think to a certain extent that a lot of the more adventurous writers — the good poets, writers of experimental fiction, and people with a lot of interesting, upbeat ideas — are giving up on mainstream publishers. They are signing on with the small houses because they think they will get a more sympathetic ear.

— **JOHN F. BAKER**, editor-in-chief, *Publishers Weekly*, speaking at a December 1982 symposium, "Trade Book Marketing in the 1980's"

The literary giants of tomorrow are probably being published by small presses today.

— **KARIN TAYLOR**, executive director, the Small Press Center, quoted in *The Writer*, April 1994

[Small presses] provide a great chance for the writer to write freely, without commercial restraint. They are just about the only place a new writer can get a hearing, the only place a writer can learn.

— **BILL HENDERSON**, publisher, Pushcart Press, quoted in *Wilson Library Bulletin*, November 1979

The smaller operations count as great successes sales figures that would devastate a mainstream house. And they can lavish attention on a book that a conglomerate publish would allow to languish rather than publish, marketing it expertly to the right audience.

— Editorial, “Is Publishing Perishing?,” *The Nation*, March 17, 1997

In my opinion, independent houses have been the salvation of the serious literary book in America.

— **JACK SHOEMAKER**, editor-in-chief, North Point Press, quoted in *Harper's*, August 1985

Authors should consider publishing with a smaller press if they are concerned about their book being lost on a massive list, of which only three or four command most of the publisher's attention; if their book is likely to reach a narrower-than-mass audience; if they prefer a nurturing, ongoing relationship with a publisher and editor; and if they want their book kept in print. Or if they want to be sure the book is published — edited, designed, produced and marketed — with care and enthusiasm along every step of the way.

— **SCOTT WALKER**, “Editing for a Small Press,” in *Editors on*

Editing, third edition, edited by Gerald Gross

The innocent writer can be eaten alive by a publisher's contract. It's common for publishers to try and take a share of movie rights, foreign rights, anything they can grab. Only an experienced agent knows when to make a canceling sweep of the pen.

— **JOHN GARDNER**, *On Becoming a Novelist*

I, too, have heard that publishing is a gentlemanly business, but it seems to me the gentlemanly gestures are expected mostly from the writers. All the rules go out the window as soon as money is involved.

— **CALVIN TRILLIN**, *Uncivil Liberties*

It's interesting to think how... book publishing is so widely regarded as a business of great intellectual achievement — one of the last great gentlemanly businesses in the world. I've been at the bar for twenty-three years... Let me tell you, things have been pulled on me — in the gentlemanly publishing business — that are more venal than anything that was ever tried on me in Wall Street.

— **MORTON JANKLOW**, literary agent, quoted in *The Blockbuster Complex* by Thomas Whiteside

Publishers kill authors by creative bookkeeping... Publishers have always cheated authors... I believe that publishers are still cheating authors.

— **RICHARD CURTIS**, *How to Be Your Own Literary Agent*

Publishers are not necessarily either philanthropists or rogues... As a

working hypothesis, regard them as ordinary human beings trying to earn their living at an unusually difficult occupation.

— **SIR STANLEY UNWIN**, *The Truth About Publishing*, perhaps countering Henry James's assertion that "Publishers are demons — there is no doubt about it."

Not to generalize that it's a lousy business. But not to elevate it above the so-called commercial world, either.

— **MORTON JANKLOW**, literary agent, quoted in *The Blockbuster Complex* by Thomas Whiteside

∞ QUOTES & MISQUOTES ∞

Quotation is the highest compliment you can pay to an author.

— **SAMUEL JOHNSON**, English lexicographer

Next to being witty, the best thing is being able to quote another's wit.

— **CHRISTOPHER N. BOVEE**, quoted in *Peter's Quotations* by Dr. Laurence J. Peter

I often quote myself. It adds spice to my conversation.

— **GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**, playwright, quoted in *Reader's Digest*, June 1943

Nothing gives an author so much pleasure as to find his works respectfully quoted by other learned authors.

— **BENJAMIN FRANKLIN**, *Poor Richard's Almanac*

To be occasionally quoted is the only fame I hope for.

— **ALEXANDER SMITH**, *Dreamthorp*

The wisdom of the wise and the experience of the ages are perpetuated by quotations.

— **ISAAC DISRAELI**, *Curiosities of Literature*

I quote others only the better to express myself.

— **MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE**, *Essays*

That was the reporter's fault. He should not have listened to me.

— What many politicians seem to be saying

∞ READERS & READING ∞

Books are helpful in bed. But they are not responsive.

— **MARY HEMINGWAY** (Ernest's widow), *People*, December 13, 1976

Perhaps the reason why the U.S.A. lags behind other nations in book-reading is that there are so many people trying to write and have no time left over for reading.

— *The Author and His Audience*, J. B. Lippincott Co.

Of all the many things in which we recognize some universal comfort — God, sex, food, family, friends — reading seems to be the one in which the comfort is most undersung, at least publicly.

— **ANNA QUINDLEN**, *How Reading Changed My Life*

While we pay lip service to the virtues of reading, the truth is that there is still in our culture something that suspects those who read too much, whatever reading too much means, of being lazy, aimless dreamers, people who need to grow up and come outside to where real life is, who think themselves superior in their separateness.

— **ANNA QUINDLEN**, *How Reading Changed My Life*

I divide all readers into two classes: those who read to remember and those who read to forget.

— **WILLIAM LYONS PHELPS**, quoted in *Reader's Digest*, December 1940

There can be no such thing, really, as too many books, only too few readers.

— Editorial, *The Nation*, November 20, 1982

∞ REJECTION ∞

A rejection (which in any case is directed toward your work and not to you as a person) may well reflect more unfavorably on the editor's ability than on yours.

— **JUDITH APPELBAUM and NANCY EVANS**, *How to Get Happily Published*

Remember, an editor is not God, only a person with a certain viewpoint, certain taste; therefore, don't let rejection stop you from writing or sending out.

— **TOI DERRICOTE**, poet, quoted in *The First-Book Market*, edited by Jason Shinder

I think the percentage of very good books — the really notable books — that are declined is higher than the percentage of highly competent mediocrities. The reason is that the books of the greatest talent are almost always full of trouble, and difficult, and they do not conform to the usual standards.

— **MAXWELL PERKINS**, editor, letter to Alice D. Bond, July 17, 1944. Quoted in *Editor to Author: The Letters of Maxwell E. Perkins*, selected and edited by John Hall Wheelock.

Mame garnered something like 52 rejections before it was sold. The number of books that become hits after being rejected is enormous. The reason is, really good work is *different*, and different means risk to an editor.

— **JAMES N. FREY**, "The Mother of All Attitudes," in *The*

Portable Writers' Conference, edited by Stephen Blake Mettee

The history of publishing is replete with tales of editorial idiocy.

— Unidentified editor, “How Book Publishing Decisions Are Made,” *1983 Writer's Handbook*

Has no reader interest.

— A British publisher rejecting Frederick Forsyth's *Day of the Jackal*, quoted in *The Experts Speak* by Christopher Cerf and Victor Navasky. The novel subsequently sold eight million copies.

A period novel! About the Civil War! Who needs the Civil War now — who cares?

— **HERBERT MAYES**, editor, *Pictorial Review*, turning down the opportunity to serialize Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With The Wind*. Quoted in *The Magazine Maze* by Herbert R. Mayes.

No one would want to read about a presidential campaign after it was finished.

— What Theodore White was told before embarking on his successful *Making of the President* series. Original source unknown.

Who in hell wants to read about a bunch of crazy Scandinavians floating around the ocean in a raft?

— A publisher who turned down Thor Heyederdahl's *Kon-Tiki*. The book topped the *New York Times* best seller list for over a year.

Look, they're not interested in a talking seagull.

— What Richard Bach’s agent told him after his novel *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* was rejected more than 20 times. The book went on to sell 3,107,500 copies in hardback. The only novel to ever sell more hardcover copies was Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With The Wind*.

Face it... “Parables don’t sell.”

— What Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen’s agent told them after their 33rd rejection. Their book, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, was formally rejected over 100 times (and informally another 111 times at an American Booksellers Association convention) before a small Florida publisher agreed to take it on. *Chicken Soup for the Soul* went on to sell 7 million copies. It also spawned numerous sequels that sold another 28 million books. Quoted in *Time*, June 8, 1998.

Not one expert in the magazine business thought there was (a market for Ms) — not one.

— **GLORIA STEINEM**, founder, *Ms* magazine

To see what chance a talented, unknown author had of getting a novel published or represented, I typed up Jerzy Kosinski’s *Steps* and submitted it, untitled, to 14 major publishing houses and 13 literary agents. To another 13 agents a letter of inquiry was sent. (The highly acclaimed novel won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1969.) The book was rejected by all 14 publishing houses (including Random House, the original publisher of *Steps*) and the 26 agents. None recognized the work, and no one thought it deserved to be published.

— **CHUCK ROSS**, *Chicago Sun-Times*, March 30, 1980

A southern writer named John Kennedy Toole wrote a comic novel about life in New Orleans called *A Confederacy of Dunces*. It was so relentlessly rejected by publishers that he killed himself. That was in 1969. His mother refused to give up on the book. She sent it out and got it back, rejected, over and over again. At last she won the patronage of Walker Percy, who got it accepted by the Louisiana State University Press, and in 1980 it won a Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

— **JOHN WHITE**, *Rejection*

Lee Pennington has been published in more than 300 magazines — and rejected so many thousand times that in one six-month period he papered all four walls of a room with rejection slips.

— **JOHN WHITE**, *Rejection*

Who wants to read about bums, and especially bums in Albany?

— What William Kennedy was repeatedly told when he tried to sell his novel *Ironweed*. The book was rejected 13 times before winning a 1984 National Book Critics Circle award and the 1984 Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

I've filled scrapbooks with them (rejection slips) . . . I use rejection slips as coasters. . . Sometimes I have rejection parties.

— **LEE PENNINGTON**, *Writer's Digest*, August 1982

Here is his record for failure. From the time John started writing for publication he produced six novels. None was published. He wrote

twenty-five completed plays. None was produced. He wrote more than one hundred short stories before one was published. John Toland was forty-two years old before his first book was published. It was not until after twenty years of diligent writing and rewriting that he stumbled upon, or had thrust upon him, the one discovery that enabled him to become a success as an author of books.

— **RALPH DAIGH**, *Maybe You Should Write a Book*

I've always had complete confidence in myself. When I was nothing, I had complete confidence. There were ten guys in my writing class at Williams College who could write better than I. They didn't have what I have, which is guts. I was dedicated to writing and nothing could stop me.

— **JOHN TOLAND**, quoted in *Writer's Digest*, April 1978

No matter how people return your work, the only one who can send you packing is yourself.

— **BETSY LERNER**, *The Forest for the Trees*

Never, ever quit. Never. You don't know how far away you are from where you wanna be.

— **COLIN FALCONER**, "9½ Great Writing Tips from 9½ Writers," Looking for Mr. Goodstory blog, November 26, 2012, www.colinfalconer.Wordpress.com/2012/11/26/91/2-great-writing-Tips-from-9½-great-writers/

If every (literary) agent in the end turns you down, you know you're either not good enough or too good. If you're too good, keep writing,

and keep your contacts with the writing community available to you, and eventually your day will come.

— **JOHN GARDNER**, *On Becoming a Novelist*

Any ambitious would-be author worth half his salt would prefer notoriety to neglect.

— **SCOTT RICE**, English professor, San Jose State University, introduction, *It Was a Dark and Stormy Night*

Bill's big success is based on failure.

— Headline of an Australian newspaper, November 11, 1975, describing the efforts of Bill Gold, the author of an unpublished novel about the publishing game, *One Best Seller*. Gold reaped extraordinary publicity for his efforts; however, he was not able to capitalize on his opportunity because he did not have a salable product.

See also "[Success and Failure](#)."

∞ RESEARCH & SCHOLARSHIP ∞

Get your facts first, and then you can distort 'em as much as you please.

— **MARK TWAIN**, quoted in *From Sea to Sea* by Rudyard Kipling

To treat your facts with imagination is one thing, but to imagine your facts is another.

— **JOHN BURROUGHS**, essayist, quoted in *Peter's Quotations* by Dr. Laurence J. Peter

Faulty research is like a faulty septic tank. Sooner or later the evidence will surface and become embarrassing.

— **REX ALLEN SMITH**, quoted in *The Self-Publishing Manual* by Dan Poynter

Research is absolutely essential for me. The trick is to know when to finally stop doing it and actually go to work.

— **LARRY GELBART**, *Laughing Matters*

Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored.

— **ALDOUS HUXLEY**, *Proper Studies*

A man will turn over half a library to make one book.

— **SAMUEL JOHNSON**, quoted in *Life of Johnson* by James Boswell

The next scholar sucks the few drops of honey that you have accumulated, sets right your blunders, and you are superseded.

— **A. C. BENSON**, *From a College Window*

The most important things are not always to be found in the files.

— **JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE**, *Maxims and Reflections*

The memorandum is written to protect the writer — not to inform his readers.

— **DEAN ACHESON**, former U. S. Secretary of State

Do not become archivists of facts. Try to penetrate to the secret of their occurrence, persistently search for the laws which govern them.

— **IVAN PAVLOV**, Russian physiologist, “To the Academic Youth of Russia,” February 27, 1936

The telephone book is full of facts, but it doesn’t contain a single idea.

— **MORTIMER J. ADLER**, author, quoted in *Barnes & Noble Book of Quotations*, edited by Robert I. Fitzhenry

The ultimate goal of all research is not objectivity, but truth.

— **HELENE DEUTSCH**, psychiatrist, preface to *The Psychology of Women*

It is a safe rule to apply that, when a mathematical or philosophical author writes with a misty profundity, he is talking nonsense.

— **ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD**, mathematician and philosopher

Professors are often shy, timid and even fearful people, and... dull,

difficult prose can function as kind of a protective camouflage. When you write typical academic prose, it is nearly impossible to make a strong, clear statement. The benefit here is that no one can attack your position, say you are wrong or even raise questions about the accuracy of what you have said, if they cannot tell what you have said. In those terms, awful, indecipherable prose is its own form of armor, protecting the fragile, sensitive thoughts of timid souls.

— **PATRICIA NELSON LIMERICK**, “The trouble with academic prose,” *Current*, February 1994

The vast majority of the so-called research turned out in the modern university is essentially worthless. It does not result in any measurable benefit to anything or anybody. It does not push back those omnipresent “frontiers of knowledge” so confidently evoked; it does not in the main result in greater health or happiness among the general populace or any particular segment of it. It is busywork on a vast, incomprehensible scale.

— **PAGE SMITH**, *Killing the Spirit: Higher Education in America*

[Academic research] falsifies human experience and the true nature of research. If bad research (not technically “bad” or methodologically bad but unimportant and largely irrelevant research) does not drive out good, it constantly threatens to bury the good in a vast pile of mediocrity. It encourages the notion, moreover, that routine, pedestrian work has some useful function in God’s plan for the universe.

— **PAGE SMITH**, *Killing the Spirit: Higher Education in*

America

Few nonfiction books are checked for accuracy. As a result inaccuracies abound... Many consumers are aware that the *National Enquirer* is an unreliable newspaper, but they have no idea which book publishers are the industry's *National Enquirer* equivalents.

— **STEVE WEINBERG**, *Columbia Journalism Review*, August 1991, referring to publishing's dirty secret

Books are written and published every day making claims that are subsequently proven to be untrue, or biased, or partially true. The competitive and corrective process of a free society provides its own corrective.

— **TOWNSEND HOOPE**S, president, Association of American Publishers, responding to criticisms of David Rorvik's book, *In His Image*. The book claimed — without proof — that a man had been cloned, and subsequently came under severe attack by the scientific community.

It often happens that, if a lie be believed only for an hour, it has done its work.

— **THOMAS SWIFT**, *The Examiner*

A deluge of words and a drop of sense.

— **DR. THOMAS FULLER**, *Gnomologia*

A lie can travel half way around the world before Truth puts its boots on.

— Various attributed

Scholars do not always read the scientific literature carefully. Science is not a perfectly objective process. Dogma and prejudice, when suitably garbled, creep into science just as easily as into any other human enterprise, and maybe more easily since their entry is unexpected.

— **WILLIAM BROAD and NICHOLAS WADE**, *Betrayers of The Truth: Fraud and Deceit in the Halls of Science*

When scholarship is at its worst, we create new myths out of our memories; when it is at its best, we recover a part of the lost or forgotten.

— **LESTER A. BEAURLINE**, *A Mirror for Modern Scholars*

∞ REVISIONS ∞

Too much polishing weakens rather than improves a work.

— **PLINY THE YOUNGER**, Roman governor, *Letters*

A good (publishing) house should be able to recognize a publishable work even in rougher form, but many cannot.

— **CHUCK ROSS**, *Chicago Sun Times*, March 30, 1982

If it isn't good enough when we first see it, it doesn't get published.

— **FREDERICK PRAEGER**, president, Praeger Publishers,
summarizing the attitude of many publishers

The majority of published writers I have known write first drafts that are riddled with craft errors and embarrassingly bad writing compared to the version that finally sees print. They know that writing is truly rewriting.

— **SOL STEIN**, *Stein on Writing*

First drafts are for learning what your novel or story is about. Revision is working with that knowledge to enlarge or enhance an idea, or reform it.

— **BERNARD MALAMUD**, novelist, quoted in *First Person Singular* compiled by Joyce Carol Oates

Nothing comes out right the first time. A first draft is an outline, nothing more.

— **JAMES W. BLINN**, novelist, quoted in *The Writer*, July 1997

A professional writer is a professional reviser.

— **JOHN LONG**, *Writer's Little Book of Wisdom*

The best authors are always the severest critics of their own works; they revise, correct, file and polish them, till they think they have brought them to perfection.

— **EARL OF CHESTERFIELD**, May 6, 1751, letter to his son

I can't write five words but that I change seven.

— **DOROTHY PARKER**, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Spring 1956

The biggest difference between a writer and a would-be writer is their attitude toward rewriting... Unwillingness to revise usually signals an amateur.

— **SOL STEIN**, *Stein on Writing*

There are very few pages in *Ragtime* that I didn't write a half-dozen times or more.

— **E. L. DOCTOROW**, novelist, quoted in *Conversations With American Writers* by Charles Ruas

I've done as many as eighty drafts of one poem... I've found students shocked to learn that it can take me three years to finish a poem.

— **CAROLYN FORCHE**, quoted in *The Writing Business: A Poets & Writers Handbook*

I rewrite everything, almost idiotically. I rewrite and work and work, and rewrite and rewrite some more.

— **LAURA Z. HOBSON**, novelist, quoted in *Conversations* by Roy Newquist

If it doesn't work, begin something else.

— **BERNARD MALAMUD**, novelist, quoted in *Words and Their Masters* by Israel Shenker

I rewrote the ending to *Farewell to Arms*, the last page of it, thirty-nine times before I was satisfied.

— **ERNEST HEMINGWAY**, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Spring 1958

(Margaret Mitchell) said she had written at least forty first chapters... and that whenever she had nothing to do and nothing to read, she had written another first chapter and each one looked worse than the last.

— **ANNE EDWARDS**, *The Road to Tara*

I work over my manuscript many times until I feel there is nothing more that I can change to improve it.

— **SAUL BELLOW**, novelist

There are passages in every novel whose first writing is pretty much the last. But it's the joint and cement, between those spontaneous passages, that takes a great deal of rewriting.

— **THORNTON WILDER**, playwright, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Winter/Spring 1957

The wastepaper basket is still the writer's best friend.

— **ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER**, short story writer/ novelist, quoted in *The Book of Quotes* by Barbara Rows

A really great novel is made with a knife and not a pen. A novelist must

have the intestinal fortitude to cut out even the most brilliant passage so long as it doesn't advance the story.

— **FRANK YERBY**, novelist

A thing may in itself be the finest piece of writing one has ever done, and yet have absolutely no place in the manuscript one hopes to publish.

— **THOMAS WOLFE**, novelist

A successful book is not made of what is in it, but what is left out of it.

— **MARK TWAIN**, February 23, 1897 letter to William Dean Howells, quoted in *Mark My Words* by Mark Dawidziak

I know it's finished when I can no longer stand working on it.

— **BERNARD MALAMUD**, novelist, quoted in *Words and Their Masters* by Israel Shenker

A writer knows when his book is finished, in the same way that an artist knows when his painting is finished.

— **SIDNEY SHELDON**, "Speaking of Fiction," *1995 Writer's Handbook*

Successful writing takes great exertion, and multiple revisions, refinement, retooling — until it looks as if it didn't take any effort at all.

— **DINTY W. MOORE**, *The Mindful Writer*

∞ SATIRE ∞

The job of satire is to frighten and enlighten.

— **RICHARD CONDON**, novelist

The goal of Satire is reform, the goal of Comedy acceptance.

— **W. H. AUDEN**, poet and playwright

Satire [is] a form of writing in which the message is serious and the method is humor.

— **DR. LAURENCE J. PETER**, *Why Things Go Wrong or the Peter Principle Revisited*

I think satire is among the most powerful weapons we have. You can do more with it than any other kind of writing.

— **ART BUCHWALD**, April 1965 *Playboy* interview

I'd say roughly that the difference between a satirist and a humorist is that the satirist shoots to kill while the humorist brings his prey back alive.

— **PETER DE VRIES**, novelist, quoted in *Counterpoint*, compiled and edited by Roy Newquist

A man can't write successful satire except he be in a calm judicial good humor... I don't ever seem to be in a good enough humor with anything to satirize it. No, I want to stand up before it and curse it and foam at the mouth — or take a club and pound it to rags and pulp.

— **MARK TWAIN**, letter to William Dean Howells, January 30,

1879, quoted in *The Selected Letters of Mark Twain*, edited by Charles Neider

An ounce of ridicule is often more potent than a hundred-weight of argument.

— **ANTHONY TROLLOPE**, *The Eustace Diamonds*

Only exceptionally rational men can afford to be absurd.

— **ALLAN GOLDFEIN**, quoted in *Peter's Quotations* by Dr. Laurence J. Peter

Satire requires a nimble mind, the ability to make leaps of the imagination. One must have a profound knowledge of a subject to satirize it, since it must be carried beyond its normal form and then distorted in order to show its various facets.

— **JOHN BAILEY**, *Intent on Laughter*

Before one can satirize a subject effectively he must know pretty much all there is to know about it. Satire is more intellectual than other types of humor. It demands a good deal of the reader. What's more, it has a purpose other than to make you laugh, and that is to point out a fault or foible, to deflate pomposity.

— **RICHARD ARMOUR**, satirist, quoted in *I Get My Best Ideas in Bed: And Other Words of Wisdom From 190 of America's Best-Selling Authors*, edited by William Melton

Satire is not the greatest type of literature... Still, it is one of the most original, challenging and memorable forms.

— **GILBERT HIGHET**, *The Anatomy of Satire*

Men have written satire on the gravest of themes and the most trivial, the most austere and the most licentious, the most sacred and the most profane, the most delicate and the most disgusting. There are few topics which satirists cannot handle.

— **GILBERT HIGHET**, *The Anatomy of Satire*

When a satirist uses uncompromisingly clear language to describe unpleasant facts and people, he intends to do more than make a statement. He intends to shock his readers.

— **GILBERT HIGHET**, *The Anatomy of Satire*

Though laughter is his mode, the satirist is... fundamentally a moralist.

— **MARTIN C. BATTESTIN**, introduction, *Joseph Andrews/Shamela* by Henry Fielding

Satire is what closes on Saturday night.

— **GEORGE S. KAUFMAN**, playwright, quoted in *George S. Kaufman* by Howard Teichmann

Satire is moral outrage transformed into comic art.

— **PHILIP ROTH**, *Reading Myself and Others*

Satirists are not supposed to be balanced. They're supposed to be unfair... It's part of the job description.

— **GARRY TRUDEAU**, creator, "Doonesbury," speech at an Associated Press Managing Editors convention, November 27, 1984

There is no denying that satire is an ungentlemanly art.

— **GARRY TRUDEAU**, speech, “What a Long Strange Strip It’s Been.” Quoted in (Los Angeles) *Daily News*, June 30, 1997.

One *Catch-22* or *Dr. Strangelove* is more powerful than all the books and movies that try to show war “as it is” . . . One cartoon by Herblock or by Bill Mauldin is worth a hundred solemn editorials.

— **WILLIAM ZINSSER**, *On Writing Well*

The program you are about to see is “All in the Family.” It seeks to throw a humorous spotlight on our frailties, prejudices and concerns. By making them a source of laughter, we hope to show — in a mature fashion — just how absurd they are.

— Announcer describing the television program to a preview audience, January 21, 1971

Creatures like George S. Kaufman... don’t even know what satire is... Their stuff is as dull as yesterday’s newspaper. Successful satire has got to be pretty good the day after tomorrow.

— **DOROTHY PARKER**, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Spring 1956

See also “[Wit](#).”

∞ SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING ∞

They [university presses] were established because of the need to publish meritorious scholarly work that would not attract a large enough readership by commercial publishers.

— 1979 report of the American Council of Learned Societies

The university press is like the medieval monastery, lonely yeomen carrying the torch of learning. They publish what must be published, especially if they are books a commercial publisher wouldn't touch with a ten-foot salesman.

— **GENE SHALIT**, “Today” show critic

Losing money is what university publishing is all about.

— **THOMAS MCFARLAND**, director, University Press of New England

We're allowed to make a profit, but over the long haul the red and black years tend to cancel out each other. It's like playing football against Princeton — you win one, you lose one. Our task is to break even.

— **CHESTER KERR**, former director, Yale University Press

It has been timid editorially, conservative politically and esthetically.

— An indictment of university presses by **CHARLES NEWMAN**, novelist and professor of literature, *The Post-Modern Aura: The Art of Fiction in an Age of Inflation*

Mediocre manuscripts on routine, specialized topics — a category (Jane)

Isay (former editor of Yale University Press) refers to as “15 Minutes With the French Revolution” — tend to be read routinely. They elicit no strong response one way or the other, and are therefore likely to be favorably reviewed.

Outstanding books, on the other hand, must meet high standards. Reviewers get provoked by such books, Ms. Isay said; they get interested and start to take issue with them — all of which tends to lead to a negative review.

She said she suspected that Plato, with his use of dialogue and his penchant for changing the subject, would have had a hard time with outside reviewers.

— Item in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, reporting on a Wesleyan University conference on the scholarly publishing of controversial books, May 4, 1983

Mostly we have published for the smallest, narrowest constituency, the scholars in the sub-disciplines (not even the disciplines) and the libraries at the largest or richest universities.

— **KENNETH ARNOLD**, Rutgers University Press Director,
“Taking Charge of the Future,” *Scholarly Publishing*, January 1988

∞ SCREENWRITING ∞

The most important element in any movie is the screenwriter, his story and his words.

— **LIZ SMITH**, *New York Post*, May 7, 1996

It starts with what's on the page. To me the biggest star of any [movie] is what's on the page — in other words, the writer. I don't care how many actors or stars are in the picture, or who's directing it or who's producing it or what company's releasing it — if it isn't on the page, it's not going to work. That's your biggest star — the writer.

— **ROBERT EVANS**, producer, quoted in *The Culture Barons* by Faye Levine

Everyone knows that the screenplay is never the decisive factor [in deciding whether a movie is filmed]. What counts is the deal structure, where something is shot, what stars are lined up.

— **JIM HARRISON**, novelist and screenwriter, quoted in *Time* magazine, September 2, 1985. Harrison, who has had 19 books of fiction, poetry, and prose published, and whose screenwriting credits include *Wolf* (1994) and *Revenge* (1990), wrote and sold 15 screenplays before one was actually produced.

Film is a director's medium... A number of us have written prose fiction for many years and won awards which are perceived as external signs of success. But to think that we can sit down and write a play or a movie is a complete mistake... It's like the difference between jogging and swimming. You have to use a whole different set of muscles, beginning

again — virtually at zero.

— **JOYCE CAROL OATES**, novelist, quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 1991

Believe me, if you can think of a good script, they'll grab it. There aren't too many good scripts around.

— **PADDY CHAYEFSKY**, screenwriter and novelist

There are only eleven good writers in all of Hollywood.

— **MEL BROOKS**, filmmaker, quoted in *The Craft of the Screenwriter* by John Brady

We sometimes do screenplays by committee.

— **WILLIAM PETER BLATTY**, novelist and screenwriter, quoted in *Counterpoint*, compiled and edited by Roy Newquist

When you think about it, who has more power to influence people than filmmakers?

— **WOLF SCHNEIDER**, *American Film*, May 1991

Screenwriting, any creative writing, sometimes feels like trying to hammer and nail down a daydream, a heartbreak, a confession.

— **STEPHEN REBELLO**, screenwriter and author of *Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho*, interview in *La Repubblica*, March 21, 2013

It's a bastard art... in that no one reads what you write, except people who are going to destroy it.

— **DAVID GILER**, *screenwriter*

Finish a book and there is a sense of accomplishment; finish a script and the shit starts.

— **JOHN GREGORY DUNNE**, novelist and screenwriter

I'm pretty bad about deviating from the words on the page because I only view a script as a blueprint. It's written to be revised. The process is that you're making a movie, not photographing a screenplay. The screenplay is simply one of the tools you use to get there.

— **JOHN MCTIERNAN**, action director whose credits include *Die Hard*, *Die Hard with a Vengeance*, *Predator*, and *Last Action Hero*. Quoted in *The Insider's Guide to Writing for Screen and Television* by Ronald B. Tobias.

In Hollywood, the writer is regarded as someone you can buy and replace.

— **STIRLING SILLIPHANT**, screenwriter, quoted in *Reel Power* by Mark Litwak

Writers are the women of the film industry.

— **ELEANOR PERRY**, screenwriter and novelist, quoted in the *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, March 25, 2001

They ruin your stories. They massacre your ideas. They do prostitute your art. They trample on your pride. And what you get for it? A fortune.

— Unidentified screenwriter, quoted in *Saturday Review*, December 26, 1970

If you are lucky or talented enough to become in demand as a screenwriter, the amounts you are paid are so staggering, compared to real writing, that it's bound to make you uneasy.

— **WILLIAM GOLDMAN**, *Adventures in the Screen Trade*

Writing a good movie brings a writer about as much fame as riding a bicycle.

— **BEN HECHT**, screenwriter

The writers who feel a lot of pride cannot survive here. They are better suited to writing books and plays where they can retain control.

— **JAREM LARDNER**, screenwriter, quoted in *Reel Power* by Mark Litwak

People who run down screenplays because they don't like the form is a little like saying, "You make very beautiful chairs, but I can't take them seriously because all they do is hold people's butts up."

— **THOMAS MCGUANE**, screenwriter

In an industry that is based on illusion, the greatest illusion of all is that anyone who can learn to scrawl his name in crayon in kindergarten can write a screenplay.

— **ALJEAN HARMETZ**, *Esquire*, July 1991

Let me tell you about writing for films. You finish your book. Now, you know where the California state line is? Well, drive to it, take your manuscript and pitch it across. No, on second thought, don't pitch it across. First, let them toss the money over. Then you throw it over, pick

up the money and get the hell out of there.

— **ERNEST HEMINGWAY**, novelist, quoted in *The Book of Hollywood Quotes* by Gary Herman

I tried to keep that larcenous, cynical view as much as I could, because I thought that's what it would take to get me through, and it worked.

— **SCOTT SPENCER**, novelist, quoted in *Conversations With American Writers* by Charles Ruas

Giving your book to Hollywood is like turning your daughter over to a pimp.

— **TOM CLANCY**, novelist, quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1995

Hollywood reminds me of a fortress besieged: Everyone outside is trying to get in, and everyone inside is trying to get out.

— **RONALD B. TOBIAS**, *The Insider's Guide to Writing for Screen and Television*

The latest collective American wet dream: the salable screenplay.

— **DAVID FREEMAN**, "The Great American Screenplay Competition," *Esquire*, June 1980

I once visited a successful Hollywood producer, and he gave me a list of what the American people don't like. They've done market research, and they know... The only movie one is allowed to write is a cheap imitation of last year's blockbuster.

— **JOHN GARDNER**, *On Becoming a Novelist*

Generally, these executives reserve all their enthusiasm for movies that have made money; those are the only movies they like.

— **PAULINE KAEI**, film critic, *The New Yorker*, June 23, 1980

Contrary to what most people think, the studios aren't really in the entertainment business. They're in the business of earning a profit for their stockholders.

— **NED TANEN**, former chief of Universal Studios, quoted in *The Film Year Book*, edited by Al Clark

If I go into Universal and even mention the word art, security forces will come and take me away.

— **TERRY GILLIAM**, director and screenwriter of *Brazil*, the award-winning film that was released by Universal only after Gilliam publicly embarrassed the studio by surreptitiously screening the movie for critics himself. Quoted in *Time*, December 30, 1985.

Don't smell 'em, sell 'em.

— The prevailing shibboleth at many literary agencies, according to agent MELINDA JASON. Quoted in *Reel Power* by Mark Litwak.

Garbage though they turn out, Hollywood writers aren't writing down. That is their best.

— **DOROTHY PARKER**, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Spring 1956

You have to have a name today to get a script read. The story doesn't count for anything anymore. It's all money, money, money.

— **HOWARD KOCH**, one of the original co-authors of “Casablanca,” upon hearing the results of another Chuck Ross experiment, *Wall Street Journal*, November 26, 1982. Ross retyped the script of the classic “Casablanca,” changed the title and the characters' names, and submitted it to 217 agents. 184 rejected it. (See also “[Rejection](#)” for Ross's literary experiments.”)

For them not to recognize “Casablanca” is like an English professor not recognizing *Huckleberry Finn* . . . It's pretty discouraging to think that if you sat at home and wrote a screenplay as good as “Casablanca,” you might not get anywhere. But on the other hand, one good thing you can say is that the guys who rejected your screenplay were idiots.

— **CHUCK ROSS**, freelance writer, quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*, November 26, 1982

∞ SELF-DECEPTION ∞

'Tis a vanity common to all writers, to overvalue their own production.

— **JOHN DRYDEN**, dedication, *Examen Poeticum*

A writer judging his own work is like a deceived husband — he is frequently the last person to appreciate the true state of affairs.

— **ROBERT TRAVER**, quoted in *Contemporary Novelists* by James Vinson

If a writer's ego ever wilts, he is ruined. It is the only thing that can sustain him through those lonely months while he is trying to piece together a book out of one recalcitrant word after another. Every morning he has to persuade himself, all over again, that putting words on paper is the most important thing in the world... that he has something to say which thousands of people not only will listen to, but pay for... Only an egomaniac can believe these things, for they defy all the evidence.

— **JOHN FISCHER**, former book and magazine editor, essay in *Writing in America*, edited by John Fischer and Robert B. Silvers.

(Fischer also noted that because of the sheer number of books being published, “the odds therefore are overwhelmingly against any given writer making a ripple on the public consciousness. Or even making a living.”)

It is in the ability to deceive oneself that the greatest talent is shown.

— **ANATOLE FRANCE**, French novelist, poet, and critic, quoted in *A Cynic's Breviary* by J. R. Solly

As much as we'd all prefer to pretend our calling is a noble one, it's salutary to bear in mind that the last thing this poor old planet needs is another book. The only reason to write anything is because it's something you want to do.

— **LAWRENCE BLOCK**, *Telling Lies for Fun and Profit*

I advise every young person who aspires to be a writer to cultivate that divine arrogance because without it I doubt you will succeed.

— **JAMES MICHENER**, *James A. Michener's Writer's Handbook*

You have to believe. It's like religion. The priests who don't have the hardest lives.

— **DON CARPENTER**, novelist, quoted in *Fiction!*

People... think that publication will give them self-esteem, and peace of mind, make them feel whole and redeemed. But it's a fantasy, like thinking that marriage, or weight loss, or money will make you well.

— **ANNE LAMOTT**, Salon.com, December 10, 2002

It is not true that 80% [of the public] have a novel in them. Most don't even have a letter.

— Anonymous letter writer, *Salon*, April 2, 2013,
www.salon.com/2013/04/02/im_a_self_publishing_failure/

Be honest with yourself. If you are no good, accept it.

— Attributed to **JEANETTE WINTERSON**, British novelist

∞ SELF-PUBLISHING ∞

Authors have figured out they don't need publishers to publish books.

— **JENN WEBB**, “Five Things We Learned About Publishing in 2011,” referring to the e-book revolution,

www.radar.oreilly.com/2011/five-lessons-publishing-2011

Gone is our confidence that publishers and agents know exactly what everyone wants to (or should) read, and can spot all the material worth our attention.

— **ALISON BAVERSTOCK**, “Ten ways self-publishing has changed the books world,” *The Guardian*. April 8, 2013,

www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2013/apr/08/self-publishing-changed-books-world

Never overestimate the number of people who read books. A great chunk of the public never reads anything beyond grocery ads; another chunk reads only newspapers; another vast number may occasionally read a book but not buy one; and most who would be willing to buy a book just don't get around to it.

— **THOMAS A. WILLIAMS**, “Book Publishing: Where The Money Comes From,” May 14, 2009

Today, an unknown publisher can produce a book that is every bit as high quality as a book by W. W. Norton... That is an enormous change, and you could not say it twenty-five years ago.

— **TOM ROSS**, publishing consultant, quoted in *Publishers Weekly* special anniversary issue, July 1997

The electronic revolution seems not only to be legitimizing self-publishing, but institutionalizing it.

— **RICHARD CURTIS**, “The Flight to Quantity,” *Publishers*

Weekly, October 16, 2000,

www.publishersweekly.com/pw/print/20001016/27133-my-say-the-flight-to-quantity-.html

E-books have not just opened up the relationship between the publisher and consumer. Now the world of publishing is suddenly a brand new place for writers, and for the first time in my publishing tenure, writers have meaningful control over how and when their content connects with a consumer (and for how much), independent of a traditional publisher, and in a more immediate way than the self-publishing craze of the late 90s and early 2000s.

— **STACEY BARNEY**, editor, “Am I Still Digging Publishing?,”

Huffington Post, August 11, 2011

Traditional publishers stop marketing a book when the month-long introduction ends or it stops selling — whichever comes first. There is little input from the author. As a self-publisher, you control this decision... You can keep your book in print forever — or at least as long as it takes for readers to discover your book.

— **GUY KAWASAKI and SHAWN WELCH**, *APE: Author,*

Publisher, Entrepreneur: How to Publish a Book

A self-publisher will very often be able to reach local, regional, or narrow markets far less expensively and more profitably than will a commercial publisher... A book that may be quite properly seen as a

foolish gamble by a commercial publisher may be a perfectly sensible candidate for publication by its own author.

— **DAVID M. BROWNSTONE and IRENE M. FRANCK**, *The Self-Publishing Handbook*

One of the biggest mistakes (self-publishers make) is a poor choice of subject. The average person does not really think about the marketability of their subject before they get started.

— **MARILYN ROSS**, *Griffith's Spotlight* newsletter, November 1987

Before you make any editorial decisions, you should always ask yourself the question: “Who will buy the book, and why?”

— **JOHN KREMER**, *1001 Ways to Market Your Book*

Before you write a book you should ask yourself: Will this book add value to people's lives?”

— **SHAWN WELCH**, co-author of *APE: Author Publisher Entrepreneur*, quoted in *Consumer Affairs*, March 21, 2013, www.consumeraffairs.com/news/is-self-publishing-your-book-even-worth-it-these-days-032113.html

There are so many of us humans who are ready to self-publish or publish with little or no more thought than we would give to having a meal at a fancy restaurant.

— **CYNTHIA FRANK**, publisher, Cypress Press, quoted in “200 Million Americans Want to Publish Books, But Can They?,” *Publishing Perspectives*, May 26, 2011

Don't self-publish because you think it will be easier than trying to find an agent and a publisher. It won't. Self-publishing is a tremendous amount of work. You have to be prepared, not only to be an author, but a business person too.

— **M. J. ROSE and AMY EDELMAN**, “Tough Love: Things No One Is Brave Enough to Tell Self-Published Authors,” *Huffington Post*, May 17, 2011

Publishing a book is not the same as printing a book. Publishing is about marketing and sales and distribution and risk. If you don't want to be in that business, don't!

— **SETH GODIN**, author, “Advice for Authors,” January 2012, www.thedominoproject.com/2012/advice-for-authors-part-one-and-part-two.html

Publishing your own work is no magic bullet; it guarantees nothing and is not a “better” or “smarter” way to go than the more traditional route. It's also not a worse path. Each path has its own thorns and rocks, just as each path offers its own staggering vista and exhilarating hikes.

— **CHUCK WENDIG**, “25 Things to Know About Self-Publishing (or, “How To Sell a Bazillion Books in 17 Minutes,” August 30, 2011, www.terribleminds.com/ramble/2011/08/30/25-things-you-should-know-about-self-publishing/

My only problem with self-publishing and its advocates is that it is too often oversold. It's offered up like a glorious beacon, a smart way to beat the system, the only way to keep your integrity as an artist, etc., etc. These promises sound too good to be true, and they are.

— **A. LEE MARTINEZ**, “Another Self-Publishing Rebuttal,”
June 21, 2012, www.aleemartinez.com/self-publishing-rebuttal/blog/21062012/

I wouldn't necessarily recommend [self-publishing] to a first-time author. A self-published book is almost certainly going to end up on the digital slush pile, with fewer readers than the average blog post. But for a writer like me, which is to say, most working writers — midcareer, midlist, middle-aged, more or less middlebrow, and somewhat Internet savvy — self-publishing seems to make a lot of sense at this point.

— **NEAL POLLACK**, “The Case for Self-Publishing,” *New York Times Book Review*, May 20, 2011,
www.nytimes.com/2011/05/22/books/review/the-case-for-self-publishing.html?pagewanted=all

Self-publishing will consume all the time, concentration and energy you've got. If you don't want to commit your soul to the project, forget it.

— **MARK ALVAREZ**, *Home-Office Computing*, February 1992

Anyone can self-publish, but only those who take responsibility will succeed.

— **BOB MAYER**, “11 Keys to Self-Publishing Success,” March 25, 2012, www.thewritersguidelinetoepublishing.com/11-keys-to-self-publishing-success

Writing, publishing, and marketing one book, let alone several, will *absolutely consume your life*. You will not have a free minute. The life

of a published indie author, who is selling, will not be the same as it was before he or she chose to enter the world of publishing. If you think you can write a book, publish and sell without changing your lifestyle, you are believing a big fat lie.

— **JEFF BENNINGTON**, “Common Lies Self-Published Authors Believe,” May 22, 2012,

www.thewritingbomb.blogspot.com/2012/05/common-lies-self-published-authors.html

We’ve seen time and time again that the self-publishers who enjoy consistent success are those who treat self-publishing like a business they’ve started up... [Once] the book is going to be out in the world, for sale with a *pricetag* on it, the romance must drop away and the book must meet standards *and* be a viable product.

— **CATHERINE HOWARD**, “How to Sell Self-Published Books: Read This First,” May 5, 2012,

www.catherineryanhoward.com/2012/05/05/how-to-sell-self-published-books-read-this-first/

[Self-publishers] must handle a list of functions that would make a bee hive surrender: jacket design, printing, interior design, page layout, promotion and marketing, distribution, bill collecting, and accounting.

— **CAROL A. BUCHANAN**, “The Entrepreneurial Author: Self-Publishing Is Not an Easy Road,” August 24, 2011,

www.mtbusiness.com

If you self publish, you are no longer just the author, you’re the salesperson for your book. Do you have any experience selling?

— **JANET REID**, “Some hard numbers,” October 24, 2012,
www.jetreidliterary.blogspot.ca/2012/10/some-hard-numbers.html

Are you the type of person who wants to be behind the wheel rather than go along for the ride?

— **TOM and MARILYN ROSS**, *The Complete Guide to Self-Publishing*

Self-publishing is not difficult. In fact, it may be easier than dealing with a publisher. The job of the publishing manager is not to perform every task, but to see that everything gets done.

— **DAN POYNTER**, *The Self-Publishing Manual*

The big New York trade publishers may have more promotional connections than you but with a whole stable of books to push, your book may get lost in the shuffle. At least if you self-publish, you can be sure your book is in the hands of someone who cares— you.

— **DAN POYNTER and MINDY BINGHAM**, *Is There a Book Inside You?*

Ultimately, self-publishing is a high-stakes game. Books often fail, but successful writers can actually make more money from a self-published book than they could through a big publishing company.

— **JOHN TESSITORE**, “Desktop Publishing Wave Brings Tide of New Authors to Bookstore Shelves,” *Christian Science Monitor*, July 11, 1996

Before you jump head long into publishing a book, make sure you have

the funds to do so... Be clear on your goals and market, then sit down with someone who can help you determine a budget.

— **PENNY C. SANSEVIERI**, *52 Ways to Sell More Books!*

Don't dip into your child's college fund. Don't mortgage your house. Don't take a cash advance on your credit card. Think with your wallet.

— **MARK LEVINE**, *The Fine Print of Self-Publishing*

To think every self-published author makes it big is as foolish as thinking every MFA grad does.

— **EDAN LEPUCKI**, "Do It Yourself: Self-Published Authors Take Matters into Their Own Hands,"

www.themillions.com/2011/11/do-it-yourself-self-published-authors-take-matters-into-their-own-hands.html

You should expect to pay a minimum of \$5,000 for the various services necessary to produce a quality book.

— **JANICE HILDRETH**, *Idaho Statesman*, February 16, 2013

Only a minority [less than 10%] make enough to live off their earnings.

— **PHILIP JONES**, "Self-publishing: under 10% of authors earn living," *The Bookseller*, May 24, 2012, referring to a survey conducted by an Australian publisher and an authors' services business

If you're bent on becoming another J. K. Rowling or Dan Brown, think of lightning striking, or winning the lottery, because those are the equivalent.

— **CAROL A. BUCHANAN**, “The Entrepreneurial Author: Self-Publishing Is Not an Easy Road,” August 24, 2011,
www.mtbusiness.com

While both the self-published fantasy writer Amanda Hocking and CIA thriller author John Locke show that independent authors can succeed in attracting big publishers and contracts, it seems, for now, that they are the exception, not the rule.

— **BARBARA E. HERNANDEZ**, “Self-Published Authors Still Make the Jump to Publishing Houses,” *Mediashift*, January 18, 2012, www.pbs.org/mediashift/2012/01/self-published-authors-still-rarely-make-the-jump-to-publishing-houses018.html

The anomalies of self-published fiction, the Amanda Hockings of this world— what did they do with their next book? Do they self-publish it? No— they make sure they get a publisher.

— **JODI PICOULT**, novelist and self-publishing opponent, quoted in “Jodi Picoult on New Novel *Lone Wolf*, Supporting Assisted Suicide and Why She’s Against Self-Publishing,” by Sam Parker, *Huffington Post*, April 9, 2012,
www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/09/jodi-picoult-lone-wolf_n_1412980.html?ref=topbar

Self-publishing is not for everyone, nor is it equally suitable for all types of books.

— **DAVID M. BROWNSTONE** and **IRENE M. FRANCK**, *The Self-Publishing Handbook*

It's gotta be good. The same rule applies to self-published e-books as it does to print books. You have to start with a good product if you have any hope of selling it.

— **DAVID CARNOY**, “How to self-publish an e-book,” June 1, 2012, www.reviews.cnet.com/8301-18438_7-20010547-82/how-to-self-publish-an-ebook/

If you intend your book to be read by anyone other than your family and friends, you need to pay for the most extensive editing you can afford, and you need to make sure that whoever edits your book is a professional book editor... If you want to be taken seriously as an author, you have to suck it up, get out the checkbook, and pay for great editing.

— **MARK LEVINE**, *The Fine Print of Self-Publishing*

If you don't treat it as a serious business, your readers are not likely to treat you as a serious author.

— **R. L. COPPLE**, “When Self-Publishing Goes Wrong,” www.graspingforthewind.com/2011/12/16/when-self-publishing-goes-wrong/

Self-publishers against enlisting the services of a professional editor and/or proofreader seem to be against it because it's expensive and/or because they don't understand what editing means. The “I can't afford it” thing drives me completely cuckoo because if you can't afford to spend some money on your product, you shouldn't be self-publishing it. If you're not prepared to invest, why should I be expected to buy? And buy a *substandard* product at that.

— **CATHERINE HOWARD**, “How to Sell Self-Published Books: Read This First,” May 5, 2012,
www.catherineyanhoward.com/2012/05/05/how-to-sell-self-published-books-read-this-first/

The plan for your marketing is your road map. You’d never consider driving from San Diego to New York without a map, nor should you embark on a marketing program without some kind of map to guide you through the process.

— **PENNY C. SANSEVIERI**, *52 Ways To Sell More Books!*

The cover of your book is going to be your book’s most important advertisement.

— Unknown

If a book looks self-published, buyers are not going to buy it.

— **TOM DEVER**, book designer, “200 Million Americans Want to Publish Books,” *Publishing Perspectives*, May 5, 2011
www.publishingperspectives.com/2011/05/200/200-million-americans-want-to-publish-books/

There’s nothing wrong with designing your own cover— if you’re actually a cover designer. Otherwise, you should leave it to the pros.

— **PENNY SANSEVIERI**, “Eight Mistakes That Will Absolutely Kill Your Book!,” *The Huffington Post*, October 19, 2011

A bad cover will kill your book. The book might be brilliant, but a cover that looks cheap and cheesy tells the world, “Hey, the rest of this thing is

as crappy as the outside.”

— **MARK LEVINE**, *The Fine Print of Self-Publishing*

High-profile book reviewers refuse books routinely because of an awkward cover. Book distributors do the same. They bring so many books to the world that they only have time to work with winners, so they have to judge your book quickly. The cover can make or break the deal.

— **GEORGE FOSTER**, “Cover Design,” chapter in *The Writer’s Essential Tool Box* by Lynn Price

Bookstore browsers spend an average of 8 seconds looking at the front cover and 15 seconds studying the back cover before making a buying decision. Online bookstores such as Amazon reduce the decision time even further.

— **PENNY SANSEVIERI**, “Eight Mistakes That Will Absolutely Kill Your Book!,” *The Huffington Post*, October 19, 2011

Fall is the biggest time for New York publishers to launch a book and perhaps the worst time for you to send your book to market if you’re self-published.

— **PENNY C. SANSEVIERI**, *52 Ways to Sell More Books!*

Self-publishing should not be confused with vanity press publication.

— **BILL HENDERSON**, president, Pushcart Press, essay, “Independent Publishing: Today and Yesterday,” in *Perspectives on Publishing*, edited by Philip G. Altbach and Sheila McVey

The vanity publisher is out to milk you for all he can get... He demands legal control of the books you paid him to print, makes only the most rudimentary attempts to sell copies, and then makes you pay him again to get the books back.

— **STEPHEN GOLDIN AND KATHLEEN SKY**, *The Business of Being a Writer*

Indie authors need to be careful about whom they do business with... Vanity publishers accept anyone and charge unsuspecting authors to publish their work, often producing books that are poorly written, have not been edited, have awful covers, and are (for all intents and purposes) virtually worthless in the commercial book market. Worthless to everyone except the vanity publisher, who makes thousands of dollars from the author.

— **ALLAN DOUGLAS**, “Avoiding Self-Publishing Scams,”
www.allandouglas.com/blog/publishing-2/avoiding-self-publishing-scams, July 2, 2012

I’m not surprised people get scammed. When you want something so badly, and you can’t seem to make progress toward that goal— no matter how hard you work— you start to go crazy. You get desperate.

— **DAVID GAUGHAN**, “The Author Exploitation Business,”
May 4, 2013, <http://davidgaughan.wordpress.com>. Gaughan noted that several traditional publishers, including Penguin and Simon & Schuster, are now in bed with vanity publishers like Author Solutions.

In two years, my [vanity] publisher only sold four books out of 2,000.

Any kid on the street could peddle my books around the neighborhood and sell a dozen in one evening.

— **HOWARD HENRY MOST**, “A Warning to Writers,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 8, 1981

Vanity publishing is essentially the kiss of death for any book.

— **WILLIAM A. GORDON**, post on LinkedIn, November 23, 2012

Whoever said books are not judged by their covers never worked in retail.

— Unknown

Libraries as well as bookstores and critics avoid vanity books like the plague. So should you.

— **JANE ADAMS**, *How To Sell What You Write*

∞ SUCCESS & FAILURE ∞

Success is never final and failure never fatal. It's courage that counts.

— **GEORGE R. TILTON**, educator, quoted in *The World's Best Thoughts About Success & Failure* compiled by Eugene Raudsepp

To me, a real “failure” is to write a bad book. A public failure is to have a book that is not a success— that's not the same thing.

— **FRAN LEBOWITZ**, humorist, quoted in *Harper's Bazaar*,
July 1983

The worst that can happen to the writer who tries and fails— unless he has inflated or mystical notions of what it is to be a novelist— is that he will discover, for him, writing is not the best place to seek joy and satisfaction. More people fail at becoming successful businessmen than fail at becoming artists.

— **JOHN GARDNER**, *On Becoming a Novelist*

More great Americans were failures than they were successes. They mostly spent their lives not having a buyer for what they had for sale.

— **GERTRUDE STEIN**, *Everybody's Autobiography*

F. Scott Fitzgerald died thinking he was an absolute failure. Today he's one of the icons of American fiction.

— **IRWIN SHAW**, novelist, quoted in *Counterpoint*, compiled and edited by Roy Newquist

On the door to success it says Push and Pull.

— Yiddish proverb

My view is that to sit back and let fate play its hand out and never influence it at all is not the way man was meant to operate.

— **JOHN GLENN**, U. S. Senator and astronaut, quoted in *New York* magazine, January 31, 1983

Success is the child of Audacity.

— **BENJAMIN DISRAELI**, *Iskander*

Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly.

— **ROBERT F. KENNEDY**, *To Seek a Newer World*

To follow, without halt, one's aim: That's the secret of success.

— **ANNA PAVLOVA**, *Pavlova: A Biography*, edited by A. H. Franks

Success... depends upon knowing how long it will take to succeed.

— **CHARLES-LOUIS MONTESQUIEU**, French political philosopher, *Pensees Diverses*

Successful men usually snatch success from seeming failure. If they know there is such a word as defeat they will not admit it. They may be whipped, but they are not aware of it. That is why they succeed.

— **A. P. GOUTHEY**, quoted in *The World's Best Thoughts on Success & Failure* compiled by Eugene Raudsepp

Successful men and women... don't consider the odds. They just sneak up at night and cut their own holes in the fence.

— **WELLS ROOT**, *Writing the Script*

You'll make mistakes. Some... will call them failures, but I have learned that failure is really God's way of saying, "Excuse me, you're moving in the wrong direction."

— **OPRAH WINFREY**, 1997 commencement address at Wellesley College. Quoted in *Time*, June 16, 1997.

No one knows what he can do till he tries.

— **PUBLILIUS SYRUS**, *Maxim* 786

Failure teaches us valuable lessons: Don't try that again. Or try in a different way.

— **DINTY W. MOORE**, *The Mindful Writer: Noble Truths of the Writing Life*

As a writing coach, I can testify that most writers fail...[because] they can't stay focused.

— **JAMES N. FREY**, "The Mother of All Attitudes," in *The Portable Writers' Conference*, edited by Stephen Blake Mettee

Fear of failure is the reason most often cited to explain why so many aspiring writers never realize their dreams. But I think it's that same fear of failure that absolutely invigorates those who push through— that is, the fear of not being heard.

— **BETSY LERNER**, *The Forest For The Trees*

The greatest pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do.

— **WALTER BAGEHOT**, *Literary Studies*

For every person who will say yes, there are twenty who will say no. For a positive response you must find the twenty-first person.

— **CHUCK REAVES**, *The Theory of 21: Finding the Power to Succeed*

Success makes us intolerant of failure, and failure makes us intolerant of success.

— **WILLIAM FEATHER**, editor and publisher

Success, n. The one unpardonable sin against one's fellows.

— **AMBROSE BIERCE**, *The Devil's Dictionary*

The only reward to be expected from the cultivation of literature is contempt if one fails and hatred if one succeeds.

— **VOLTAIRE**, French philosopher, *Letter to Mlle. Quinault*

There is always something about your success that displeases even your best friends.

— **OSCAR WILDE**, English humorist, quoted in *The World's Best Thoughts on Success & Failure* compiled by Eugene Raudsepp

Success may come at any stage of a novelist's life.

— **JOHN BRAINE**, *Writing a Novel*

I never wrote anything that was published until I was forty.

— **JAMES MICHENER**, novelist, quoted in *The Complete Guide to Writing Fiction* by Barnaby Conrad

Most successful members of society have broken the traditional age-rules. They have done things when they wanted to do them and have ignored any imagined limitations on them.

— **DESMOND MORRIS**, *The Book of Ages*

As every publisher knows, good books— books of high literary or scholarly merit— fail as often, if not more often, than do books of questionable merit.

— **CURTIS G. BENJAMIN**, *A Candid Critique of Book Publishing*

Many books fail which would have succeeded two or three years earlier, or two or three years later, because the mood of the public — the directions in which the winds of interest blow — changes so rapidly.

— **MAXWELL E. PERKINS**, editor, letter to novelist Arthur Train, June 21, 1938, cited in *Editor to Author: The Letters of Maxwell E. Perkins*, selected and edited by John Hall Wheelock

In the arts there are no A's awarded for effort.

— **JOHN BRAINE**, *Writing a Novel*

A writer cannot choose when or if success will come. You can only do your best and be prepared for your moment of opportunity by writing, writing— and then writing some more.

— **NOREEN AYRES**, novelist, quoted in *Unstoppable* by Cynthia Kersey

The first 12 years are the worst.

— Attributed to **ANNE ENRIGHT**, British author

Success is what sells.

— **ANDY WARHOL**, artist, quoted in *Conversations with American Writers* by Charles Ruas

There is only one success — to be able to spend your life in your own way.

— **CHRISTOPHER MORLEY**, *Where the Blues Begin*

∞ TALENT ∞

Literature is an occupation in which you have to keep proving your talent to people who have none.

— **JULES RENARD**, *Journal*

It strikes me now and then that talent may be one of the least important variables in the writing business. People without super-abundance of talent succeed anyhow. People with tons of talent never get anywhere. It happens all the time. And it happens, I guess, in every field or endeavor.

— **LAWRENCE BLOCK**, *Telling Lies for Fun and Profit*

The luck of having talent is not enough; one must also have a talent for luck.

— **HECTOR BERLIOZ**, composer

A talent somewhat above mediocrity, shrewd and not too sensitive, is more likely to rise in the world than genius, which is apt to be perturbable and wear itself out before fruition.

— **CHARLES HORTON COOLEY**, American sociologist

Luck is the residue of design.

— **BRANCH RICKEY**, former owner, St. Louis Cardinals

It took me fifteen years to discover I had no talent for writing, but I couldn't give it up because by that time I was too famous.

— **ROBERT BENCHLEY**, *On Himself*

Everyone has a talent. What is rare is the courage to follow that talent to

the dark places where it leads.

— **ERICA JONG**, “The Artist as Housewife,” *The First Ms. Reader*, edited by Francine Klagsburn

A great deal of talent is lost to the world for the want of a little courage.

— **SYDNEY SMITH**, *Elementary Sketches of Moral Philosophy*

It is my belief that talent is plentiful, and that what is lacking is staying power.

— **DORIS LESSING**, “Into the Labyrinth,” essay in *Author! Author!*, edited by Richard Findlater

Nearly everything in the scheme of things works to dull a first-rate talent.

— **NORMAN MAILER**, novelist, quoted in *Writers at Work*, Third Series

Great practitioners in any field make it look easy, so bystanders murmur in awe about talent. What the bystander never sees is the agony of effort, study, and practice that made the final performance appear effortless—the fruits of a professional attitude.

— **JACK M. BICKHAM**, *Writing Novels That Sell*

How often one hears a young man with no talent say when asked what he intends to do, “I want to write.” What he really means is, “I don’t want to work.”

— **W. H. AUDEN**, *The Prolific and the Devourer*

If I’m a lousy writer; then a helluva lot of people have lousy taste.

— **GRACE METALIUS**, author, *Peyton Place*, quoted in *The Great Quotations* by George Seldes

∞ TELEVISION, WRITING FOR ∞

To truly understand television, you must first unlearn a popular misconception. Except in the strictest technological sense, television is not primarily a communications medium. It is primarily a sales medium. In an interesting reversal of the normal box office concept, it sells its audience to the actual and only customers, the advertisers.

— **STEWART BRONFELD**, *Writing For Film and Television*

TV sponsors are trying to win customers, not alienate them; so most TV humor is “safe.”

— **STEVE ALLEN with JAN WOLLMAN**, *How to Be Funny*

The reason that I think that most TV comedy is so awful is because people write it with an audience in mind. Because somebody tells them who is watching it and who has to like it. That is a backwards way to write.

— **FRAN LEBOWITZ**, humorist, 1983 interview, Akron *Buchtelite*, by William A. Gordon

Television demands a lot of material in a short time. Sometimes that doesn't afford the luxury of polishing each little gem to the luster that you would prefer. The producers knock on your office door and ask, “is it done?”, not “is it funny?”

— **GENE PERRET**, *How to Write and Sell Your Sense of Humor*

In TV... you learn to say, “It's just another play, it's just another movie.” We mustn't don the mantle of posterity every time we sit down

to a typewriter. You learn to say, “Let the rest of the world worry about posterity. I’ll just go on with what I want to do.” You learn a lot of things.

— **PADDY CHAYEFSKY**, quoted in *The Craft of the Screenwriter* by John Brady

Fame is an unlikely result of writing for television. How many television writers can you name?

— **STUART M. KAMINSKY**, *Writing for Television*

Television is so low-grade not because talent is in short supply (the insider’s excuse) or because the producers want to make dreck (the critic’s exasperated judgment) but because it doesn’t have to be any better.

— **PAT AUFDERHEIDE**, *In These Times* cultural critic, reviewing *Inside Prime Time* by Todd Gitlin, date unknown

Nobody’s setting out to make shit, but there are just so many Jim Brooks and Allen Burnses. Television would be wonderful if it were only on Wednesday night.

— **GRANT TINKER**, former NBC executive, quoted in *Inside Prime Time* by Todd Gitlin

Commercial television makes so much money doing its worst that it cannot afford to do its best.

— **FRED FRIENDLY**, former president, CBS

The biggest best seller in modern times was probably *Gone With The*

Wind. People who never read a book in their lives had to read that — and what was the sale? Maybe 20 million copies, the absolute saturation point. Put that against the total population! Compare it with the television audience!

— **ROBERT GIROUX**, publisher, Farrar, Straus & Giroux

Disparaging television has long been a favorite national pastime—second in popularity only to watching it.

— “Television Looks at Itself,” *Harper’s*, March 1985

I just think it’s very nice for our industry and for our country as a whole that in 1998 an award in comedy writing can be won by a Gentile, and I thank you.

— **PETER TOLAN**, accepting a best writing award (shared with Garry Shandling) for the “Larry Sanders Show.” Emmy Awards program broadcast on NBC, September 12, 1998.

∞ WIT ∞

True wit is rare, and a thousand barbed arrows fall at the feet of the archer for every one that flies.

— **WILLIAM ZINSSER**, *On Writing Well*

There's a hell of a distance between wisecracking and wit. Wit has truth to it, wisecracking is simply calisthenics with words.

— **DOROTHY PARKER**, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Spring 1956

You know, someone once said that Dorothy Parker had wasted her life wisecracking. I really can't think of a better use of a life.

— **FRAN LEBOWITZ**, humorist, quoted in *New Times*, July 10, 1978

Wit is the salt of conversation, not the food.

— **WILLIAM HAZLITT**, *Lectures on the English Comic Writer*

There's no possibility of being witty without a little ill-nature.

— **RICHARD SHERIDAN**, playwright

Wit is educated insolence.

— **ARISTOTLE**, *Rhetori*

[*Definition of a witticism*] A sharp and clever remark, usually quoted and seldom noted; what the Philistine is pleased to call a "joke."

— **AMBROSE BIERCE**, *The Devil's Dictionary*

Wit is the rarest quality to be met with among people of education.

— **WILLIAM HAZLITT**, *Characteristics*

∞ WRITERS & MONEY ∞

Few men have ever (depended upon their pen for daily bread). Few men have ever done it happily... Most writers, from Shakespeare down, have had other resources.

— **HENRY HOLT**, publisher, *The Atlantic*, November 1905

I believe the saddest news one has to give any young writer just setting out is that very few good writers are able to support themselves by their writing.

— **PETER TAYLOR**, *The Writer's Craft*

The life of a writer is usually one of permanent insecurity.

— **JAMES T. FARRELL**, *James T. Farrell: Literary Essays, 1954-1977*, collected and edited by Jack Alan Robins

Of the 250 million people in the United States, maybe sixty or so make a good living from writing fiction.

— **PETER RUBIE**, “An Editor Speaks From the Trenches,” *The Writer*, September 1992

Even “successful” writers, when their incomes are averaged out over a working lifetime, do well to make a postman’s salary, without the benefits.

— **JAYNE ANN PHILLIPS**, novelist and short story writer, essay, “Why She Writes,” in *Why I Write: Thoughts on the Craft of Fiction*, edited by Will Blythe

Given the amount of time it takes to write a good book, working at McDonald's makes more financial sense.

— **PAT WALSH**, *78 Reasons Why Your Book May Never Be Published and 14 Why It Just Might*

If writers were good businessmen, they'd have too much sense to be writers.

— **IRWIN S. COBB**, playwright, quoted in *Peter's Quotations* by Dr. Laurence J. Peter

Becoming an author in order to get rich is like going to the desert in order to become wet.

— **J. E. FISHMAN**, "Two Common Misperceptions About Book Publishing," December 1, 2010, "The Nervous Break-down" blog

Although writing ranks among the top 10 per cent of professions in terms of prestige, writers' income prove drastically lower than those of the doctors and lawyers who share the high-esteem rating— and you can't, as the saying goes, eat prestige.

— **JEAN STROUSE**, *Newsweek*, June 22, 1981

The annual (financial) report of *New York Review of Books* . . . showed editorial expenses of \$44,761 representing fees for contributors— and \$102,000 for messengers.

— **MACK CARTER**, *Adweek*, February 18, 1985

To say that writers, as a group, are underpaid is a grotesque understatement. The fact is that most of us cannot survive on what we

earn from writing, despite the attention that the select few receive from million-dollar contracts.

— National Writers Union Guide to Freelance Rates and Standard Practice

[While bestselling authors are earning more now] . . . for new authors, mid-list authors, the advances are getting lower and lower.

— **GREG ANAPU**, literary agent, quoted in the *Miami Herald*, November 16, 2012

A book that netted a \$50,000 advance just a few years ago would be fortunate to snag a \$10,000 one now. “They say that 50 is the new 40,” Anapu added. “Well, in publishing, \$10,000 is the new \$50,000.”

— **CARLOS HARRISON**, “Self-publishing industry explodes, brings rewards, challenges,” The *Miami Herald*, November 16, 2012

There is only one way to make money at writing, and that is to marry a publisher’s daughter.

— Advice given to George Orwell by a Russian friend. Quoted in *Down and Out in Paris and London* by George Orwell

Sir, no man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money.

— **SAMUEL JOHNSON**, English lexicographer, quoted in *Life of Johnson* by James Boswell

Dr. Johnson... wrote one of the minor masterpieces of English literature to get enough money to pay for his mother’s funeral. Balzac and

Dickens without shame wrote for money.

— **W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM**, *Great Novelists and Their Novels*

There is probably no other trade in which there is so little relationship between profits and actual value, or into which sheer chance so largely enters.

— **KATHLEEN O'BRIEN**, English writer, quoted in *Author! Author!*, edited by Richard Findlater

We know our writers can't live on what we're paying them, but we've got a thousand kids out there who'll work for nothing.

— Unidentified editor-in-chief of one of the largest mass market circulation magazines, quoted by James Lincoln Collier, "Can Writers Afford to Write Books?," *Publishers Weekly*, July 31, 1981

It is better to have a permanent income than to be fascinating.

— **OSCAR WILDE**, English novelist, playwright and critic

As a younger man I wrote for eight years without ever earning a nickel, which is a long apprenticeship, but in that time I learned a lot about my trade.

— **JAMES MICHENER**, novelist, quoted in *Conversations with Writers II*, edited by Matthew J. Bruccoli

I never write— indeed, am physically incapable of writing— anything I don't think will be paid for.

— **TRUMAN CAPOTE**, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Spring/

Summer 1957

This isn't the Lawn Tennis Association, where you just play for the thrill of it.

— **JIMMY BRESLIN**, columnist, quoted in *The Self-Publishing Manual* by Dan Poynter

Why shouldn't writers live well? They contribute the most precious commodities to the world: the ideas and values that shape society. Isn't a professional entitled to be paid for his work?

— **PAT KUBIS and BOB HOWLAND**, *Writing Fiction, Nonfiction and How to Publish*

Always we come upon this feeling, ridiculous, senseless and baseless—that it is beneath the dignity of an author to manage his business matters as a man of business should.

— **WALTER BESANT**, essay, "Commercial Values," in *Author! Author!*, edited by Richard Findlater

No one... ever thought of reproaching the barrister, the solicitor, the physician, the surgeon, the painter, the sculptor, the actor, the singer, the musician, the composer, the architect, the chemist, the physicist, the engineer, the professor, the teacher, the clergyman, or any other kind of brain worker that one can mention, with taking fees or salaries or money for his work.

— **WALTER BESANT**, essay, "Commercial Values," in *Author! Author!*, edited by Richard Findlater

There exists a stupid literary tradition... that a hungry writer is the best writer— an empty stomach and slum dwelling being considered most conducive to good books, honest books, uncorrupted books. Revolting nonsense, I say... The really hungry writer, I truly believe, is the one most susceptible to corruption and dishonesty, for he has a problem that must intrude on his creativity. The problem is: he must eat. And to eat, he must often put aside writing as he pleases, to write potboilers for the marketplace, to write what he is told to write.

The writer who has money, enough or a lot, has to compromise with no one, do nothing he does not want to. He can afford to write as he pleases.

— **IRVING WALLACE**, novelist, quoted in *Conversations* by Roy Newquist

No one ever told a story well standing up or fasting.

— **HONORE DE BALZAC**, novelist, quoted in *Barnes & Noble Book of Quotations*, edited by Robert I. Fitzhenry

Write without pay until somebody offers you pay. If nobody offers within three years the candidate may look upon the circumstance with the most implicit confidence as the sign that sawing wood is what he was intended for.

— **MARK TWAIN**, quoted in *The Wit and Wisdom of Mark Twain*, edited by Alex Ayres

If the only thing motivating you is money, you're dead in the water. You need passion to bolster your perseverance and help see your project through.

— **ROB D. YOUNG**, “Eight Signs It’s Time to Scrap Your Writing Project,” November 21, 2012, www.litreactor.com/columns-8-signs-its-time-to-scrap-your-writing-project

I don’t want to take up literature in a money-making spirit, or be very anxious about making large profits, but selling it at a loss is another thing altogether, and an amusement I cannot well afford.

— **LEWIS CARROLL**, in a letter to his publisher, quoted in *Letters to Macmillan*, edited by Simon Nowell-Smith

If you want to get rich from writing, write the sort of thing that’s read by persons who move their lips when they’re reading to themselves.

— **DONALD MARQUIS**, author, humorist, and columnist

Writers rarely become rich and famous because of the quality of their work. They become rich and famous because of the nature of their work.

— **GARRY PROVOST**, *Writer’s Digest*, March 1986

What motivates a writer to produce a particular work is really nobody’s business. Some pretty fair poems have been written because the poet wanted to make time with a young woman, and Balzac did most of his writing because he had no alternative; the creditors were beating on the door, waiting for him to finish so they could get paid.

— **MERLE MILLER**, *Writer’s Roundtable*

A lot of money means a lot of time to write, a real luxury. Time to write is so important that I’m distressed to hear how many people in the

literary community seem to frown on commercial success. Of course, the people who frown on it the most actively are those of us who no longer need it; there's at least a little hypocrisy in this.

— **JOHN IRVING**, novelist

The only people who claim that money is not important are people who have enough money so that they are relieved of the ugly burden of thinking about it.

— **JOYCE CAROL OATES**, novelist

Who profits from all this writing activity? The manufacturers of typewriters and typing paper, of course. And the U. S. Post Office.

— **WILLIAM TARG**, *Indecent Pleasures*

∞ WRITERS ON WRITING ∞

Writing is a dog's life, but the only life worth living.

— **GUSTAVE FLAUBERT**, French novelist, quoted in *The Crown Treasury of Relevant Quotations* by Edward F. Murphy

I love being a writer. What I can't stand is the paperwork.

— **PETER DE VRIES**, novelist, quoted in *The Literary Life and Other Curiosities* by Robert Hendrickson

The test of a vocation is the love of the drudgery it involves.

— **LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH**, *Afterthoughts*

What no wife of a writer can understand is that a writer is working when he is staring out the window.

— **BURTON RASCOE**, former literary editor, *New York Herald-Tribune*

The true artist will let his wife starve, his children go barefoot, his mother drudge for her living at seventy, sooner than work at anything but his art.

— **GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**, *Man and Superman*

Never let a domestic quarrel ruin a day's writing. If you can't start the next day fresh, get rid of your wife.

— **MARIO PUZO**, novelist/screenwriter, quoted in *The 637 Best Things Anybody Ever Said*, edited by Robert Byrne

Most people who earn their livings as writers are a little nuts— perhaps

not certifiable— but certainly not exactly your average American.

— **BILL ADLER**, *Inside Publishing*

When a writer is born into a family, that family is doomed.

— Attributed to **CZESLAW MILOSZ**, Polish poet

The urge to be published may be top among human vanities.

— **ARTHUR PLOTNIK**, *Honk If You're a Writer*

Writing is the toughest thing I've ever done.

— **RICHARD M. NIXON**, former President of the United States

Every writer I know has trouble writing.

— **JOSEPH HELLER**, quoted in *The Truth About Fiction Writing*
by William Appel and Denise Sterrs

Since writing is the worst part of being a writer this can be a very depressing experience.

— **JAMES ATLAS**, *Vanity Fair*, September 1985

The most glamorous, brilliant, prestigious authors still sit by themselves with their tortured psyches and numbed fingers.

— **IRVING WALLACE**, quoted in *Conversations* by Roy Newell

Writing is so difficult that I often feel that writers, having had their hell on earth, will escape all punishment hereafter.

— **JESSAMYN WEST**, *To See the Dream*

Every writer I know is waiting for the tap on the shoulder and the voice

that says: “So you really thought you could get away with it?”

— **DEBORAH MOGGACH**, British novelists, *Mortification: Writers’ Stories of Their Public Shame*, edited by Robin Robertson

Writing is the loneliest job in the world.

— **FANNIE HURST**, novelist, quoted in *Simpson’s Contemporary Quotations*

It’s as lonesome at the end or on the mountaintops as it is at the beginning or in the valleys.

— **MICHAEL DRURY**, novelist

I don’t think loneliness is the word. John Graves said writing is “anti-life.” I’m forty-five years old. I’ve been writing full-time since I was sixteen. I’ve been writing almost every day for thirty years, and as I look back with a degree of resentment, I realize that I literally lifted chunks of my life out for drafts of things, some of which got published and some didn’t.

— **TOM GUANE**, novelist, regretting what he called “a hole in my life.” Quoted in *Conversations with American Novelists*, edited by Kay Bonetti, Greg Michalson, Speer Morgan, Jo Sapp, and Sam Stowers

I’ve always thought people write because they are not living properly.

— **BERYL BAINBRIDGE**, novelist/actress, quoted in *London’s Daily Telegraph*, September 10, 1996

No one in his right mind would sit down to write a book if he were a

well-adjusted, happy man.

— **JAY MCINERNEY**, novelist, quoted in London's *Independent Sunday*, April 19, 1992

It's a crazy business, anyway, locking yourself in a room and inventing conversations, no way for a grownup to behave.

— **JOHN LEONARD**, *Esquire*, November 1975

It's queer for a live human being, endowed with intelligence, to spend waking hours of a very mortal life cooped up in a room, not talking to anybody, just scribbling words on a page.

— **JOHN BARTH**, novelist, quoted in *First Person Singular*, compiled by Joyce Carol Oates

Writing is like making love. You have to practice to be good at it.

— **MORRIS WEST**, "How to Write a Novel," *The Writer*, May 1977

Writing, like making love, is more fun when you know what you're doing.

— **EILEEN JENSEN**, "You Can Get There From Here," *The Writer*, June 1973

I'm only really alive when I'm writing.

— **TENNESSEE WILLIAMS**, playwright

They're there, they're mine, they're my children.

— **NORMAN MAILER**, referring to his books, quoted in *Writer's Digest*, October 1983

Writing books is the closest men ever come to childbearing.

— **NORMAN MAILER**, *Conversations with Norman Mailer*

[*Definition*] The art of applying the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair.

— **MARY HEATON VORSE**, journalist

The most important part of the writer's anatomy is not the brain, where ideas are born, or the hands that transfer those ideas into concrete form, but the backside... In my experience, the big difference between published and unpublished writers is that published writers sit down and write.

— **PHILLIP M. MARGOLIN**, "How to Deal with Non-Writer's Block," *1995 Writer's Handbook*

Oh! It's a real horse's ass business.

— **JOHN STEINBECK**, novelist

[*Definition*] One of the cruelest of professions.

— **JAMES T. FARRELL**, *James T. Farrell: Literary Essays 1954-1977*, collected and edited by Jack Alan Robins

In order to be a good writer, you've got to be a bad boss. Self-discipline and stamina are the two major arms in a writer's arsenal.

— **LEON URIS**, novelist

Professionalism probably comes down to being able to work on a bad day.

— **NORMAN MAILER**, *The Spooky Art*

Write at least one page every day. If you're trying to write a book, and you are not writing at least one page a day, then the book is not going to be written.

— **JOHN GRISHAM**, March 1, 2006, interview in [Slushpile.com](http://www.slushpile.com),
www.slushpile.net/index.php/2006/03/01/interview-john-grisham-author/

Write 1,000 words a day. Be passionate about what you write. Look at writing a book as a marriage, not a one-night stand.

— **LISA SEE**, e-mail to William A. Gordon, November 27, 2011

You won't make a living writing until you learn to write when you don't want to.

— **CHELSEA CAIN**, "5 Writing Tips from Chelsea Cain,"
Publishers Weekly, August 2012,
www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/book-news/tip-sheet/article/53502-5-writing-tips-from-chelsea-cain.html

Write as much as you can!! Write, write, write until your fingers break!

— **ANTON CHEKHOV**, 1886 letter to Maria Kiselyova, quoted
in the *Guardian* (UK), April 13, 2001

What a writer needs most is energy. It's the most important thing you can have if you're really going to be a writer and outlast the bastards who'll try and stop you.

— **FREDERICK BUSCH**, quoting his father, *A Dangerous*

Profession: A Book about the Writing Life

I think the writer in America doesn't enjoy a very exalted position; he's really a third-rate citizen.

— **JAMES MICHENER**, novelist, quoted in *Conversations with Writers II*, edited by Matthew J. Bruccoli

The novelist in America... is positively regarded as a kind of freak unless he retreats to the university or hits the jackpot in the mass media.

— **HOWARD SWADOS**, novelist and short story writer

Writers are a little below clowns and a little above trained seals. God help the world if writers ever took control.

— **JOHN STEINBECK**, quoted in a 1961 Associated Press interview, reprinted in *Conversations with John Steinbeck*, edited by Thomas Fensch

Everybody can write; writers can't do anything else.

— **MIGNON MCLAUGHLIN**, *The Neurotic's Notebook*

On the whole, professional writers are a lot of whining bastards who wouldn't last a day in a real job.

— **DUNCAN McLEAN**, Scottish novelist/playwriter, in *Mortification: Writers' Stories of Their Public Shame*, edited by Robin Robertson

A writer has no choice but to be a writer.

— **BILL BUFORD**, *The New Yorker*, June 26 & July 3, 1995

The only reason for being a professional writer is that you can't help it.

— **LEO ROSTEN**, novelist/screenwriter, quoted in *Contemporary Novelists* by James Vinson

When writers say they have no choice, what they mean is: *Everything in the world conspired to make me quit but I kept going.*

— **BETSY LERNER**, *The Forest For The Trees*

No one put a gun to your head and ordered you to become a writer. One writes out of his own choice and must be prepared to take the tough spots along with the road with a certain equanimity, though allowed some grinding of the teeth.

— **STANLEY ELLIN**, *American mystery writer*

This business about having spent 50 years writing it is pure nonsense.

— **HELEN HOOVER SANTMYER**, dismissing one of the helpful myths that helped make her novel... *And Ladies of the Club* a major discovery and a publishing sensation. Quoted in Cleveland's *Plain Dealer*, January 29, 1984.

I don't recommend writing as a form of employment, because it's such miserable work... But it is something you have to do. You can't not do it.

— **TOM CLANCY**, quoted in *Time* magazine, July 29, 2002

I think all writing is a disease. You can't stop it.

— **WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS**, poet and novelist, quoted in *Newsweek*, January 7, 1957

It's a hell of a disease to be born with.

— **ERNEST HEMINGWAY**, novelist

Against the disease of writing one must take special precautions.

— **PIERRE ABELARD**, *Letter to Heloise*

A writer is in the end not his books, but his myth— and that myth is in the keeping of others.

— **V. S. NAIPAUL**, *Steinbeck in Monterey*

Every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great and original, must create the taste by which he is relished.

— **WILLIAM WORDSWORTH**, English poet, letter to Lady Beaumont, May 21, 1807, quoted in preface to the second edition, *Lyrical Ballads*

People stick a label on you and thirty years later, it's still there because they haven't the patience to look and see that it no longer fits.

— **JOHN O'HARA**, short story writer

An author is always unconsciously fighting for an image and, when he gets one, consciously fighting against it.

— **J. P. DONLEAVY**, novelist, playwright and short story writer

The writer's own responsibility is to his art. He will be completely ruthless if he is a good one. He has a dream. It anguishes him so much he must get rid of it. He has no peace until then.

— **WILLIAM FAULKNER**, novelist, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Spring 1966

Writers are always selling somebody out.

— **JOAN DIDION**, preface, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*

I am a writer. I use people for what I write. Let the world beware.

— **SHARON STONE** in the 1991 movie *Basic Instinct*.
Screenplay by **JOE ESZTERHAS**.

We are cannibals. I think it's a terrible thing to be a friend of, an acquaintance of, a relative of, a writer.

— **CYNTHIA OZICK**, speaking at an Authors Guild symposium,
October 1998

I'm basically a treacherous person with no sense of loyalty. I'd write openly about my sainted mother's sex life for art.

— **SUSAN BRAUDY**, author, *What the Movies Made Me Do*,
quoted in *Interview*, September 1985

The fewer writers you know the better.

— **MAEVE BRENNAN**, writer, *The New Yorker*

He [the writer] is not exempt from the normal obligation to be a decent human being.

— **HERBERT GOLD**, novelist, quoted in *Esquire*, August 1986

I have often been disappointed when meeting a writer whose work I admire, only to find that person off-putting. Some are downright obnoxious. How could such an unpleasant human being write with such sensitivity, such insight, and candor?

— **RALPH KEYES**, *The Courage to Write*

Be careful whom you tell [you are a writer]. Because the last thing on earth people living an ordinary life want to hear about is how you want to be a writer.

— **CAROLYN SEE**, *Making a Literary Life: Advice for Writers and Other Dreamers*

There is no rule on how to write. Sometimes it comes easily and perfectly. Sometimes it's like drilling rock and blasting it out with charges.

— **ERNEST HEMINGWAY**, novelist, in a letter to editor Charles Poore, 1953, in *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters, 1917-1961*, edited by Carlos Baker

You write a hit the same way you write a flop.

— **WILLIAM SAROYAN**, novelist

Writing a book is an adventure. To begin with, it is a toy and an amusement. Then it becomes a mistress, then it becomes a master, then it becomes a tyrant. The last phase is that just as you are about to be reconciled to your servitude, you kill the monster and fling it to the public.

— **WINSTON CHURCHILL**, quoted in *Churchill By Himself: The Definition Collection of Quotations*, edited by Richard Langworth

Great writers leave us not just their work, but a way of looking at things.

— **ELIZABETH JANEWAY**, novelist and critic, original source unknown

The books come and go. But the kids. That's what I'm leaving.

— **ERMA BOMBECK**, humorist, quoted in *People*, February 13, 1984

A good writer is one who produces books that people read... So if I'm selling millions, I'm good.

— **JACQUELINE SUSANN**, novelist, quoted in *Lovely Me* by Barbara Seaman

Every time you turn the page, this guy is masturbating! I think Philip Roth is a good writer, but I wouldn't want to shake hands with him.

— **JACQUELINE SUSANN**, novelist, quoted in *Lovely Me: The Life of Jacqueline Susann* by Barbara Seaman

Great writers are not the only interesting writers.

— **J. C. SQUIRE**, British journalist, in *The London Mercury*, 1933

There will be an unrelenting emphasis on sex. True excellence in writing will be quickly blue-penciled into oblivion.

— **MIKE McGRADY**, *Newsday* columnist's instructions to his fellow staffers when they collaborated (in 1969) on a novel, *Naked Came the Stranger*. McGrady set out to prove that a deliberately poorly written sexy novel could sell. He was right, and once the hoax was revealed, the publicity helped rocket the book to the bestsellers list.

You can't fake it. Bad writing is a gift.

— **RICHARD LE GALLIENNE**, quoted in *Pieces of Hate* by Heywood Broun

I write to find out.

— **WILLIAM MANCHESTER**, journalist and historian

That's not writing, that's typing.

— **TRUMAN CAPOTE**, appraising Jack Kerouac's work, TV interview with David Susskind, "Open End," 1959

Good writing is writing that can get published and paid for. If nobody will buy it, then it's not good.

— **GARRY PROVOST**, "What Writers Should Understand About Money," *1987 Writer's Yearbook*

Writing a book is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness. One would never undertake such a thing if one were not driven on by some demon whom one can neither resist nor understand.

— **GEORGE ORWELL**, *Why I Write*

Finishing a book is just like you took a child out in the yard and shot it.

— **TRUMAN CAPOTE**, original source unknown

One not only writes a book. One lives it. Upon completing it there are certain symptoms of death.

— **JOHN CHEEVER**, novelist, quoted in *Words and Their Masters* by Israel Shenker

No matter how much your previously published author-friends try to warn you, it can be a big shock to realize that what's a life-changing event for you is a mere blip on the literary screen, even to your own publisher.

— **KIM WRIGHT**, “Living the Dream,” *Poets & Writers*, March/April 2012

I write because I like to write.

— **PADDY CHAYEFSKY**, screenwriter/novelist, quoted in *The Craft of the Screenwriter* by John Brady

Nothing can destroy the good writer. The only thing that can alter the good writer is death.

— **WILLIAM FAULKNER**, novelist, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Spring 1956

I have made it appear as though my motives were wholly public-spirited. I don't want to leave that as the final impression. All writers are vain, selfish and lazy, and at the very bottom of their motives lies a mystery.

— **GEORGE ORWELL**, *Why I Write*

I write to find out.

— **WILLIAM MANCHESTER**, journalist and historian

[Every writer] wants to be loved. He wants people, millions and millions and millions of people to read his book and say, “You are marvelous. I love you.”

— **EVAN HUNTER**, novelist, quoted in *Conversations* by Roy

Newquist

I write for no other purpose than to add to the beauty that now belongs to me. I write a book for no other reason than to add three or four hundred acres to my magnificent estate.

— **JACK LONDON**, quoted in *Jack London* by Charles Child Walcutt

I've made a great deal of dough from my fiction, but I never set a single word down on paper with the thought of being paid for it... I have written because it fulfilled me... I did it for the buzz. I did it for the pure joy of the thing.

— **STEPHEN KING**, *On Writing*

Wanting to be read, wanting the recognition... is not a crime.

— **BETSY LERNER**, *The Forest for the Trees*

Because I hate. A lot. Hard.

— **WILLIAM GASS**, novelist, explaining why he writes, quoted in *Why I Write: Thoughts on the Craft of Fiction*, edited by Will Blythe

The truth is we write for love. That is why it is so easy to exploit us.

— **ERICA JONG**, "Doing It For Love," *The Writer*, July 1997

My main reason for adopting literature as a profession was that, as the author is never seen by his clients, he need not dress respectably.

— Attributed to **GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**

I do not think that most writers write for money alone. Good ones write mainly to please themselves and hope at the same time to please as many other people as possible.

— **MERLE MILLER**, *Writer's Roundtable*

Writing is a way of coming to terms with the world and with oneself.

— **R. V. CASSILL**, novelist

The impulse to create beauty is rather rare in literary men... Far ahead of it comes the yearning to make money. And after the yearning to make money comes the yearning to make a noise.

— **H. L. MENCKEN**, *Prejudices*

I want to live other lives. I've never quite believed that one chance is all I get. Writing is my way of making other chances.

— **ANNE TYLER**, novelist, *Washington Post*, August 15, 1976

It's the closest thing to playing God there is. You can create worlds and destroy them. You can create thousands of characters and manipulate their lives— though sometimes your characters will have a life that goes beyond a pen.

— **PAT KUBIS and BOB HOWARD**, *Writing Fiction, Nonfiction and How to Publish*

There are many reasons why novelists write— but they all have one thing in common: a need to create an alternative world.

— **JOHN FOWLES**, British novelist, quoted in *Sunday Times Magazine*, October 2, 1977

I write fiction because I want to escape from what's real and to create something that's completely different.

— **ALICE HOFFMAN**, novelist, quoted in *The Writer*, November 1994

Writing lets us stay at home. It carries us away from what is unpleasant in everyday life, while at the same time instantly conferring upon us as the mythical status of “novelist.”

— **DONALD MAASS**, *The Career Novelist*

Don't let pretentious literary talk fool you into believing that writers just write for themselves. Writing for yourself alone is creative masturbation. We do write to please ourselves, but basically we write to be read. Writing is not only a means of self-expression and catharsis; it is also a compulsive form of egotistical and infantile exhibitionism.

— **IRVING WALLACE**, novelist, quoted in *Conversations* by Roy Newquist

The need to express one's self in writing springs from a maladjustment to life, or from an inner conflict which the adolescent (or the grown man) cannot resolve in action... I do not mean that it is enough to be maladjusted to become a great writer, but writing is, for some, a method of resolving a conflict, providing they have the necessary talent.

— **ANDRE MAUROIS**, *The Art of Writing*

The quality which makes a man want to write and be read is essentially a desire for self-exposure and is masochistic. Like one of those guys who has a compulsion to take his thing out and show it on the street.

— **JAMES JONES**, novelist, quoted in *Writers at Work: Third Series*

What else is writing but showing off. Writing is the most incredible act of ego anyone can perform.

— **HARLAN ELLISON**, quoted in *The Complete Guide to Writing Fiction* by Barnaby Conrad

A person who publishes a book wilfully appears before the public with his pants down.

— **EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY**, *Letters*

Too many people think they can escape from their ailments by becoming writers. I don't object to it as occupational therapy, but writing involves a commitment greater than illness. Writing has to be worked at.

— **BERNARD MALAMUD**, novelist, quoted in *Words and Their Masters* by Israel Shenker

All writers are like bomb-throwers, whether they attack with dense academic prose or jazzy rifts of stream-of-consciousness writing. Every writer wants his words to inflame the hearts and minds of his readers.

— **BETSY LERNER**, *The Forest for the Trees*

Dismissing Dr. Johnson's assertion that "No man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money," it is safe to say that most writers aren't in it for the wages, fringe benefits, or short hours. There are much easier ways to make a buck and few better ways to stay poor. No. Lurking in the shadows behind every writer is the relentless spirit of the zealot. The act

of writing is an act of faith; someone will read and perhaps be changed.

— **KENNETH C. DAVIS**, *Two-Bit Culture*

There are two tips I would offer beginning writers: 1) Writing for fame or fortune is a fool's errand; 2) Write out of a passion, a caring, a need. The rest will follow.

— **SIDNEY SHELDON**, novelist

No one can really tell a beginning writer whether or not he has what it takes... The young writer must decide for himself, on the available evidence.

— **JOHN GARDNER**, *On Becoming a Novelist*

Learn to trust your own judgment, learn inner independence, learn to trust that time will sort good from bad—including our own bad. Do not pay attention to current literary modes, for they can be observed changing, sometimes overnight.

— **DORIS LESSING**, “Into the Labyrinth,” essay in *Author!*
Author!, edited by Richard Findlater

A budding free-lance writer should live in New York. After all, it's the seat of most magazine offices—and it's where you meet editors by chance. Most commissions have arisen from casual conversations, and contacts are horribly important. Clearly, kinship with editors cannot really be built through the mails—and certainly not by telephones.

— **NORA SAYRE**, *Mademoiselle*, March 1968

If I had to give young writers advice, I'd say don't listen to writers

talking about writing.

— **LILLIAN HELLMAN**, playwright

Your spouse, your children, your friends, and your family are usually bad judges of your writing... . The only people's opinions that can help you are those who do not care about you at all.

— **PAT WALSH**, *78 Reasons Why Your Book May Never Be Published and 14 Why It Just Might Be*

The truth is: You can't believe what your friends, lovers, or enemies say. Even if what they say is the God's honest truth, it doesn't matter, because they're not going to be able to buy your work and print it, or conversely, keep it from being bought and printed.

— **CAROLYN SEE**, *Making a Literary Life: Advice for Writers and Other Dreamers*

Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that.

— **MARK TWAIN**, original source unknown

If they're meant to be writers, they will write. There's nothing that can stop them.

— **TENNESSEE WILLIAMS**, playwright, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Fall 1981

I decided a long time ago that writers should not be encouraged. They should be discouraged. That's more helpful to a writer than encouragement, because I think he's going to learn a lot more that way.

If you are going to be a writer, you will be, encouraged or not.

— **ERSKINE CALDWELL**, quoted in *The Writer's Digest Guide to Good Writing*

One should never show an unfinished manuscript to anyone. You are sure to receive opinions contrary to some aspect of what you have written and such opinions, no matter how strong you are, may have a weakening effect upon that conviction you must sustain until your work is done. A book cannot be written by a committee. One must obey oneself alone and take one's chances.

— **PAUL HORGAN**, *Approaches to Writing*

The first advice I would give him [the young writer] would be to have him ask himself if he really wants to write, because it's not all that fun.

— **EVAN HUNTER**, novelist, quoted in *Conversations* by Roy Newquist

Always dream and shoot higher than you know how to. Don't bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself.

— **WILLIAM FAULKNER**, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Spring 1956

It's my experience that very few writers, young or old, are really seeking advice when they give out their work to be read. They want support; they want someone to say, "Good job."

— **JOHN IRVING**, novelist

Writing is a craft. You have to take your apprenticeship in it like anything else.

— **KATHERINE ANNE PORTER**, novelist and short story writer, quoted in *The Saturday Review*, March 31, 1962

Nobody becomes Tom Wolfe overnight, not even Tom Wolfe.

— **WILLIAM ZINSSER**, *On Writing Well*

The only way to learn is to force yourself to produce a certain number of words on a regular basis.

— **WILLIAM ZINSSER**, *On Writing Well*

We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master.

— **ERNEST HEMINGWAY**, quoted in the *New York Journal-American*, July 11, 1961

There isn't, unfortunately, any way of discovering whether you can write a publishable novel except by writing it.

— **JOHN BRAINE**, *Writing a Novel*

The young writer would be a fool to follow a theory. Teach yourself by your own mistakes; people learn only by error.

— **WILLIAM FAULKNER**, quoted in *The Paris Review*, Spring 1956

When I write, I aim in my mind not toward New York but toward a vague spot a little to the east of Kansas. I think of the books on library shelves, without their jackets, years old, and a countryish teen-aged boy finding them, and having them speak to him. The reviewers, the stacks

in Brentanos, are just hurdles to get over, to place the books on that shelf.

— **JOHN UPDIKE**, novelist, quoted in *Writers at Work, Fourth Series*

The chief reason that so many of the great classics seem to speak so directly to us is that the authors were consciously trying to reach us, or at least people with an astonishing resemblance to us.

— **MASON W. GROSS**, former president, Rutgers College, speech, National Book Committee, November 18, 1959, reprinted in *Writing in America*, edited by John Fischer and Robert B. Silvers

For those who say the paperback original is designed to appeal to the masses, let it be pointed out that Shakespeare, too, appealed to the masses. He wrote within a formula that demanded action and sword play, puns and low humor, and noblemen and noblewomen as heroes and heroines.

— **LAWRENCE TREAT**, *Mystery Writer's Handbook*

Tailors and writers must mind the fashion.

— **THOMAS FULLER**, *Gnomologia*

He writes nothing whose readings are not read.

— **MARTIAL**, *Epigrams*

It is the writer's fault, not the reader's, if the reader puts down the book.

— **DAVID HALBERSTAM**, author

Every act of communication presupposes a communicator and an

audience... . It's kind of a social contract. One doesn't pay \$10.00 for a book in order to be bored.

— **MORRIS WEST**, “How to Write a Novel,” *The Writer*, May 1977

The best book is a collaboration between author and reader.

— **BARBARA TUCHMAN**, *Practicing History*

I have found that sometimes it helps to pick out one person — a real person you know, or an imagined person, and write to that one.

— **JOHN STEINBECK**, letter to Robert Wallsten, February 13-14, 1962, reprinted in *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*, edited by Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten

In my opinion, the best writing has some of the qualities of conversation; and, in fact, my favorite short piece of writing advice is “read it aloud.”

— **BEN YAGODA**, quoted in “Ben Yagoda: How to Not Write Bad,” *The Daily Beast*, February 13, 2013, www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/02/13/ben-yagoda-how-i-not-write-bad.html

An author ought to write for the youth of his own generation, the critics of the next, and schoolmasters of ever after.

— **F. SCOTT FITZGERALD**, quoted in *The Guardian*. November 13, 1964

The desire for the greatest number of readers is to me not only justifiable, but a proper ambition for every writer to entertain.

— **W. B. MAXWELL**, English writer, quoted in *Author! Author!*,
edited by Richard Findlater

There is no formula which may be depended upon to produce a bestseller. There are too many impalpable considerations, too many chances and accidents, too complex a combination of conditions affecting the writing, publication, and selling of a book that make the attainment of the top rank by even the most promising candidate a certainty.

— **FRANK LUTHER MOTT**, *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Bestsellers in the United States*

The proof that no such formula exists is the extremely small number of best-sellers in relation to the total number of novels published.

— **JOHN BRAINE**, *Writing a Novel*

If someone deliberately sets out to write a best seller, what he is really saying is that he is going to write a book that will appeal to everyone. In essence, what he is looking for is the lowest common denominator. I believe when you try to appeal to everyone, the result is that you end up appealing to almost no one. Every good writer that I know writes to please himself, not to please others.

— **SIDNEY SHELDON**, “The Magical World of the Novelist,”
The Writer, November 1980

Of the top 10 all-time bestsellers, only two are Pulitzer Prize winners: *Gone with the Wind* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The literary respectability of the top five bestsellers of all time, *Da Vinci Code*, *The*

Godfather, The Exorcist, Peyton Place, and Valley of the Dolls is almost nil.

— **JAMES W. HALL**, *Hit Lit: Cracking the Code of the Twentieth Century's Biggest Bestsellers*

Writers who concentrate on pleasing all the time don't have much ultimate impact. One of the functions of an author is to arouse.

— **WILLIAM STYRON**, novelist

Our American professors like their literature clear and cold and pure and very dead.

— **SINCLAIR LEWIS**, novelist. Speech to the Swedish Academy accepting the Nobel Prize for Literature, December 12, 1930, quoted in *Literature 1901-67* by Horst Frenz.

The only sound advice I can give to the young writer is to tell him to have faith in himself. Whether he is talented or not, he must have enough faith in himself to disregard all advice and all criticism.

— **HOWARD FAST**, novelist, quoted in *Counterpoint*, compiled and edited by Roy Newquist

The most solid advice to a writer is this, I think. Try to learn and breathe deeply, really to taste food when you eat, and when you sleep, really to sleep. Try as much as possible to be wholly alive with all your might, and when you laugh, laugh like hell, and when you get angry, get good and angry. Try to be alive. You will be dead soon enough.

— **WILLIAM SAROYAN**, quoted in *Contemporary Dramatists* by James Vinson

I don't want to be studied in English classes; I want to be read.

— Attributed to **TIM O'BRIEN**, novelist

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— **FRANK S. MEAD**, editor, *The Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations*

∞ ABOUT THE EDITOR ∞

If you liked this book, you might want to read other books by William A. Gordon. His first book, *Four Dead in Ohio: Was There a Conspiracy at Kent State*, was widely praised as the definitive book on the subject. *Choice* magazine even complimented it for being “as entertaining as the best detective fiction and as analytical and well documented as the best journalism or scholarship.” One professor at Kent even complained that it read too well!

The Ultimate Hollywood Tour Book: The Incomparable Guide to Movie Stars’ Homes, Movies and TV Locations, Scandals, Murders, Suicides, and All the Famous Tourist Sites, represented a complete change of pace, even though both books demonstrated the same investigative skills. Gordon celebrated the twentieth anniversary and the twenty-fourth printing of the book in 2012. Los Angeles sightseeing companies use that book as a bible of the industry.

Shot on This Site, a spin-off book, covered movie and television locations in all fifty states. Out of print since the early 2000s, the book is currently being updated by Gordon for a series of e-books helping tourists discover where their favorite movies and television shows were filmed.

Gordon also publishes “Gordon’s Radio List,” a database of radio talk shows that interview authors. And he sidelights as a book mentor, offering advice to first-time authors.

If you would like more information about any of these books or his consulting services, visit www.nrbooks.com and www.1001tipsforwriters.com.

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